

# Wood-burner pollution is worse than traffic



Last year 14,000 tonnes of wood were consumed in wood-burning stoves across the UK  
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Wood-burning stoves produce more fine particle pollution than all the road traffic in Britain, according to new government data.

Over the past ten years, emissions caused by domestic wood-burners have increased by a third, research by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs found. It said that

17 per cent of fine particle pollution in the UK was produced by stoves in homes, compared with 13 per cent from road transport.

The proportion of wood-burner pollution is half the amount previously estimated, but it remains a “major contributor” to poor air quality.

Simon Birkett, founder and director of Clean Air in London, a campaign group, said: “It’s a public health catastrophe.

Wood-burning stoves need to be banned urgently. The first step should be to stop the sale or installation of them.”

Fine particle pollution, or particulate matter, is everything in the air that is not gas. It includes many toxins small enough to enter the bloodstream and lodge in the heart, lungs and brain.

Long-term exposure to particulate matter can be particularly



risky for people with respiratory problems. Air pollution is estimated to contribute to about 30,000 deaths a year, according to Public Health England.

Last year 14,000 tonnes of wood was consumed by the 8 per cent of the population who own wood-burning stoves. Rising energy prices are expected to lead to more homeowners turning to wood-burners, adding to the estimated 20,000 sold each year in the UK.

The government has brought in rules specifying that new stoves coming on to the market

must be “eco design-compliant”. However, a report last year claimed that even new, more environmentally friendly wood-burners produced 750 times the amount of particulate matter from a modern lorry.

The revision of the data on wood-burners came after a government survey of 50,000 homes. It said that some previous assumptions had been wrong, such as the proportion of new stoves that replaced old ones and that coal was rarely being burnt alongside wood.

Overall, the biggest particu-

late matter emitters are the construction and manufacturing industries. While a decline in coal and steel production has reduced emissions, this has been “largely offset” by increases in industrial production and wood-burning.

Alastair Lewis, of the National Centre for Atmospheric Science at the University of York, said: “Burning wood for home heating, particularly in cities, undoes many of the recent improvements seen in PM [particulate matter emissions] — hard-won gains achieved from our collective investments in cleaner cars, buses and lorries.”

The Clean Air for All campaign, launched by *The Times* in 2019, is calling for the introduction of clean air zones, tighter limits on pollution and monitors in every postcode. ■



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