

Winter Air Report – September 2005

Clear path to 2013

Spring is here at last! And while it hasn't been a cold winter (quite the opposite in fact) there has been the usual winter curse – a pall of smoke hanging over our heads from the many polluting fires and burners we use to keep ourselves warm.

But with spring comes new hope. That hope is in the form of new air quality and woodburner standards for every urban centre in New Zealand. That is now a requirement set by Government in the National Air Standards that came into effect on September 1.

Environment Canterbury is working towards this goal through its Proposed Air Plan, which is supported by the Clean Heat Project. The aim is to reduce the number of high pollution days from more than 30 a year for some urban centres to just one by 2013.

Winter 2005

The number of high pollution days that occur each winter depends on the weather as well as how much pollution is going into the air. High air pollution normally occurs during evenings when there is very little wind and clear skies. Frosts often occur with these conditions.

A series of anticyclones bringing cloud over Canterbury made this winter warmer than normal – in fact July was the third warmest nationally since records began in the 1860s.

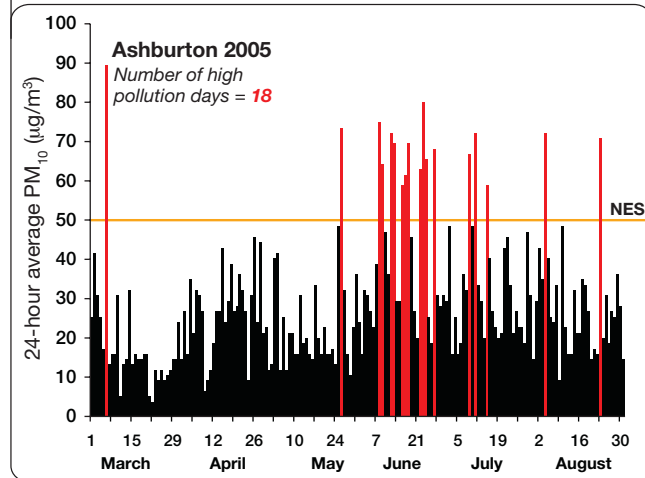
While the interval between monitoring makes it difficult to draw comparisons, the 18 high pollution days experienced in Ashburton this year was at the high end. Monitoring was last carried out in Ashburton in 1999 and 2000, when 13 and 17 high pollution days were recorded.

Air Plan update

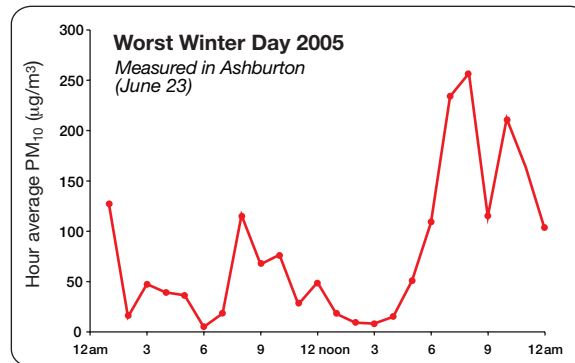
Submitters on Chapter 3 of the Proposed Canterbury Natural Resources Regional Plan (Proposed Air Plan) have had the opportunity to be heard. These hearings were adjourned in August and the Hearing Commissioners are expected to report to Council with their recommendations in early to mid-2006.

If there are no appeals, the Air Plan will be operative six months after Environment Canterbury's decision is notified. Because of this time frame the proposed ban on open fires in Christchurch, if approved, is likely to be in force in 2007.

To achieve the National Environmental Standard, Ashburton must reduce the number of high pollution days to no more than one by 2013.



This graph shows the highest pollution day in winter in Ashburton during a succession of cold, still nights.



Clean Heat Project

Most Christchurch residents (and many in other centres) know about the subsidies and practical assistance that the Clean Heat Project provides to encourage households to move to cleaner forms of heating.

Environment Canterbury mounted a high-profile advertising campaign this winter to not only promote the assistance scheme, but also to raise awareness of the sources and health effects of air pollution. This campaign, featuring on billboards and buses, radio and newspapers, raised awareness that home heating is the main source of pollution.

How financial assistance can be extended outside of Christchurch is something that Environment Canterbury and district councils are discussing. In the end, the goal of Clean Air by 2013 will need a combined effort by central and local government but will only be achieved with homeowners' willingness to change to cleaner heating.

