

Episode 56FFc June 16, 2023. Wood burning industry tactics

RAWSEP View: This article from Air Quality News exhaustively enumerates the misleading claims, the aggressive tactics, and the cozy relationship with regulators that the wood stove industry employs in countries from the United States to Canada, the United Kingdom and to Australia. The misleading claims include outright lies that residential wood burning is not linked to cancer, to greenwashing by saying that wood is natural so burning is environmentally friendly (although wood burning is not environmentally friendly or “green”), to hiding behind group names that sound like they are representative of ordinary citizens but are instead peopled by wood industry lobbyists. In Utah, it was “Utahns for responsible burning” starting in 2014, in Alaska it is “Alaskans for reliable heating”, in Comox Valley, British Columbia, Canada it is “Save our wood stoves”, where ads, for example, are paid for by the wood stove industry. The University of Bath’s (U K) website outlines Tobacco Company tactics of misinformation, which are comparable to the tactics of the wood stove industry. The wood stove industry promotes themselves as responsible business owners, and part of the solution of wood stove pollution. The wood stove industry uses wood stove changeouts for newer wood stoves to mislead in portraying themselves as part of the solution, when even the new Ecodesign wood stove is 450 times more polluting with PM2.5 than a natural gas furnace. The wood stove industry weakens and undermines regulatory controls, and pushes for wood stove exemptions to regulations when the industry cannot thwart regulation altogether. The wood stove industry has input on most Environmental Protection Agency websites from the United States to Canada, the United Kingdom and to Australia. Near Neighbors of Residential wood burners have rights that are being violated by the wood stove industry lobbying. This valuable but lengthy article concludes by stating that what really changes the tide is **the idea that, as in the tobacco industry when it was widely publicized that [non-smokers had rights that were being violated in the public sphere](#), it can be widely publicized by near neighbors of residential wood burners had rights that were being violated by smoke entering their yards and infiltrating the near neighbors’ homes. In the case of tobacco smoke everyday people [grew increasingly fed up with being forced to breathe smoke-filled air](#) and organized, eventually leading to changes in attitudes and policies around the world.** In the case of residential wood burning smoke, everyday people who are near neighbors are growing increasingly fed up with being forced to breathe residential wood smoke-filled air and will organize, eventually leading to changes in attitudes and policies around the world. **Smoke is smoke. It’s time for regulators and others to stop putting the interests of the wood burning industry before everyone else’s right to breathe clean, healthy air.**

The tactics of the wood burning industry show that they attempt to portray themselves as ordinary people, but their only concern is selling the wood stoves that pollute the air and cause unnecessary illness and death.

RAWSEP View: After the mass United States experience of the wood smoke from Canadian wildfires, the ordinary person will better understand the effect of wood smoke on everyone, and the need for first steps to be taken to rid our air of wood smoke. Regulation of residential wood burning with PM2.5 monitors placed in the yards of near neighbors is a start to regulation of the emissions from wood burning, leading to counting of emissions and based on these emission numbers at the stack, regulation of biomass (wood) burning on an industrial scale and attention to non-burning ways of slowing climate change, possibly from shifting from controlled burns to composting of wood chips to create usable topsoil for crops rather than wood chips stored as mulch that is contributing as fuel for accidental fires in 2023.

<https://www.dsawsp.org/secondhand-smoke/wood-burning-industry-tactics?fbclid=>

Air Quality News

United Kingdom and Australia

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Wood Burning Industry Tactics

Excerpts edited by RAWSEP for brevity and clarity and relationship to Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates.

Using recognizable tactics, the wood burning industry works to mislead the public and impede health-protective regulations.

1)United Kingdom

[manufacturing doubt.”](#)

UK lung cancer researcher Dr. Rebecca Booth [wrote about the industry trade group the Stove Industry Alliance \(SIA\)](#) in Air Quality News:

The SIA make “strong statements about stove emissions and the benefits of ‘EcoDesign’ stoves” on their website, but leave out important information that “would allow consumers to gauge the relative polluting power of an ‘EcoDesign’ stove versus other sources of domestic heating.”

1a) Percentage of PM2.5 pollution is significant, sometimes more than traffic

1b) High percentage of PM2.5 pollution created by only 4% of the population

The SIA boast that wood stoves create 13% of the UK’s PM2.5 pollution, implying that’s not a substantial contribution.

Even if the SIA 13% figure is correct, the SIA fails to put this figure into context; 13% PM2.5 is the same amount of PM2.5 created by all UK road transport. Since approximately 4% of UK homes have a wood stove or fireplace, a significant proportion of PM2.5 pollution is being created by a very small proportion of UK homes.

According to the European Environmental Bureau, per GJ of house heating, an ‘EcoDesign’ stove produces far more PM2.5, black carbon, nitrous oxides, methane, carbon monoxide, polyaromatic hydrocarbons and non-methane volatile organic compounds than a gas boiler. This is the case even when the best quality, seasoned wood is used and the stove is optimally managed.

2) Australia

In Australia, for instance, a representative of the Australian Home Heating Association (AHHA), an industry trade group, has claimed that “[Australia has the toughest standards in the world](#)” for wood stove emissions, while experts such as the authors of a 2021 report, Reducing the Health Impacts of Wood Heaters in Australia, have pointed out that “[current Australian wood heater standards are insufficient to protect health](#)” (PDF).

3) Deceptive claim that wood burning is natural. This is green washing. Natural makes wood burning seem to be environmentally friendly, when in reality it is not.

Just because wood is natural, [it does not mean that burning it is good for people](#) or the [environment](#). But the industry wants you to believe otherwise.

3a) Misleading Environmental Claim 1, the industry states that emissions do not include harmful gases, when wood burning emissions do include harmful gases.

The AHHA makes claims such as “wood heating is the natural way to heat your home [without harming our environment and emitting harmful gases](#),” while in [reality wood heating emits many harmful pollutants and gases, including formaldehyde, toluene, xylene, PAHs, and benzene](#). This statement and more are discussed in a report by the Australian Air Quality Group detailing “[16 Incorrect and Misleading Claims by the AHHA](#) (PDF).”

3b) The name Ecodesign implies the stove is ecologically friendly, when the wood burning stove is not.

In the UK and Europe, the latest certified wood stoves are sold under the “EcoDesign” label, the name implying they are environmentally friendly. As we note above and [elsewhere](#), however, they are, in reality, far more polluting than a non-wood-burning heat source.

3c) Misleading Environmental Claim 2, the industry suggest that wood burning is “low carbon” when wood burning is not low carbon.

Wood burning industry groups and retailers also often make claims suggesting wood heating is “low carbon” and better for the climate than other heat sources when, in reality, [wood burning is not climate friendly](#).

4) Wood stove industry lobbyists and members are trained at their academies to mislead, such as denying that wood burning emissions can lead to cancer.

Members of the Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association are taken to meet politicians in Washington, DC as part of the industry’s Government Affairs Academy training. Wood Burning Industry Lobbying and a Government Affairs Academy. In the US, the Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association (HPBA) hires lobbyists and runs [a “government affairs academy”](#) in Washington, DC that trains its members how to influence policymakers and defend the industry in the media. They explain to their members on their website: “[HPBA communicates frequently with legislators and closely follows regulatory and legislative activity](#) to promote policies that are favorable to your business. Your help is essential in achieving our legislative goals. When we go in for [HPBA Government Affairs] media training, [it was awesome to have somebody pepper us with hardball questions: ‘Well, wait a minute, are you for cancer, since you are for burning wood stoves?’ What do you say to that, when they have a microphone in your face?](#) And it was awesome to get that feedback...” a trainee was quoted, about his experience at HPBA’s Tom Pugh Government Affairs Academy lobbying and media relations training on The Fire Time Podcast with HPBA’s Government Affairs Senior Manager, Oct 23, 2018.

Front Groups and Other Campaign Tactics

5) Wood stove industry lobbyists and members interfere with attempts to protect the public from wood smoke pollution. Sometimes the wood stove industry hides behind a group like [“Utahns for responsible burning”](#), which promotes polluting wood burning.

Whenever a community in North America makes a serious attempt to protect the public from wood smoke pollution, the HPBA, or its Canadian affiliate the HPBAC, is usually not far behind. [“Utahns for Responsible Burning”](#) In late 2014, Utah officials were planning to take action on the wood smoke pollution problem in winter along the inversion-prone Wasatch Front.

6) Wood stove industry lobbyists and members consider attempts to prohibit all winter-time wood burning in Salt Lake City unwelcome surprises.

As [HPBA’s hired public relations firm Stratacomm described it](#) (on a previous version of their website, now archived): Utah opened an unwelcome holiday surprise for the fireplace and wood stove industry in mid-December 2014 when that state’s governor proposed a prohibition on all winter-time wood burning in Salt Lake City and six surrounding counties.

7) Wood stove industry lobbyists and members have a strategy for dealing with unwelcome surprises like prohibition on all winter wood stove burning in Salt Lake City. Stratacomm described their strategy: From a survey our team designed and fielded, [we learned that support for the ban was stronger than expected and activating core supporters would be key to turn the tide in HPBA’s favor.](#)

Stratacomm created a website for [“Utahns for Responsible Burning”](#) (no longer online but available archived) which claimed to represent “concerned citizens who support the responsible use of wood burning in Utah,” and launched an aggressive campaign that focused on HPBA members’ customer lists and included the efforts of a subcontracted media relations firm. )

8) Wood stove industry lobbyists and members feel responsible for getting a prohibition on all winter wood stove burning in Salt Lake City defeated. They are proud of getting this important public health measure defeated, and for prohibiting a winter-long wood burning ban in the future, statewide.

In the end, HPBA not only was responsible for getting this important public health measure defeated, they got Utah’s state legislature to pass legislation forbidding regulators in the state from being able to impose a winter-long wood burning ban in the future.

9) Wood stove industry lobbyists and members are proud that wood stove retailers rely on them. Without HPBA and all of their efforts, many of the products that are on my showroom I wouldn’t be able to sell. NA “fireplace manager,” talking in an HPBA promotional video, [Advocacy](#).

10) Another example, from Alaska.

[“Alaskans for Reliable Heating”](#)

The area around Fairbanks, Alaska is classified by the US EPA as being in “Serious Nonattainment” for PM2.5 due to residential wood burning in winter.

The state of Alaska has [spent approximately \\$12.5 million in changeout grants to replace old wood stoves with new certified ones in Fairbanks](#), but this investment has done little to improve the area’s dire wood smoke pollution problem. Having found that [there were serious problems with the EPA’s wood stove certification program](#) (PDF), the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) placed restrictions on which new certified wood stoves could be installed in the Fairbanks Serious Non-Attainment area.

Following what appears to be a similar playbook as in Utah, HPBA launched a campaign to fight ADEC’s plan that includes a misleading website for [“Alaskans for Reliable Heating.”](#)

HPBA claims that ADEC’s criteria for which certified stoves can be sold is too strict, and that there is no need for this measure. They state on the website, “The heating industry continues to produce new and cleaner stoves—we should let Alaskans continue to choose the best products for their needs.”

ADEC’s commissioner [provided a different perspective in an op-ed](#) in Fairbanks’ Daily News-Miner:

...based on local stakeholder input, we established a program to replace 25-year-old (or older) dirty stoves with what we thought were newer, cleaner burning stoves. Unfortunately, what we have found is that many of the stoves that were replaced were emitting as much, or more, than their predecessor. This was, frankly, unacceptable.

He stated that HPBA’s “campaign to fight DEC’s rules is solely to benefit national stove manufacturers, not the communities of Fairbanks and North Pole.” “HPBA is working every day to fight for its members. There’s agencies and regulations that are, you know, trying to shut down what we do. An industry retailer talking in an HPBA promotional video, [Advocacy](#).

11) Another example from Comox Valley, British Columbia, Canada.

## **“Save Our Wood Stoves”**

**British Columbia’s Comox Valley has a serious air quality problem due to wood burning.** As a step toward protecting public health, three Comox Valley cities—Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland—banned new wood stove installations in new home construction. In Courtenay and Comox, new wood stoves are also not allowed in renovations. The Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association of Canada swarmed into action with an aggressive media and ad campaign, as well as heavy political lobbying.

Speaking on [an industry podcast](#) in August 2022, HPBAC’s then-Director of Public Affairs, Jeff Loder, described some of their activities:

We have a group of members from the Valley (in Comox Valley), from across BC, and from the United States. There are around 11 of us. We meet every week to plan out exactly what we’re doing.

There’s an election this fall, and our plan, without getting into too many of the details, is to try to get the existing (at the lower municipal level) bylaws overturned. We’ve made it clear that we expect them to be overturned.

We will be doing some new marketing starting in around a week—radio, buses... We’re going to make sure every politician in the Comox Valley knows that if they’re running in the election in October, you’re going to have to deal with HPBA and HPBAC.

HPBAC’s website for this campaign is called [“Save Our Wood Stoves.”](#) It, along with the advertisements and paid articles placed by HPBAC in the local media [misleads visitors into believing that all wood stoves are going to be banned in Comox Valley, and that newer ones are cleaner than they are.](#)

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We’re going to make sure every politician in the Comox Valley knows that if they’re running in the election in October, then you’re going to have to deal with HPBA and HPBAC.

J. Loder, HPBAC’s Director Of Public Affairs at the time, talking about their strategy in Comox Valley, British Columbia, on the HPBA’s HotCast podcast August 25, 2022.

12) Another example, from Bath, England, United Kingdom

Harm Reduction Tactics

**The University of Bath’s Tobacco Tactics** website [discusses the tobacco industry’s motives for promoting “harm reduction”](#) measures.

They point out that in the 1960s and 70s, public health scientists and officials in the US and UK encouraged smokers to switch to low-tar and low-nicotine cigarette brands, believing the tobacco companies’ claims that they were creating “a less hazardous cigarette.”

They describe how the promotion of harm reduction measures benefits the industry:

It allows them to **improve their reputation.** They can be seen “as a responsible business with a legitimate product.”

It allows them to use **“newer products as tools** to initiate dialogue with scientists, public health experts, politicians and policy makers, **reframing the industry as ‘part of the solution’ rather than being responsible for the problem.”**

It helps to **weaken and undermine regulatory controls.**

It helps to **divide the public health community.**

Wood Burning Industry Harm Reduction Tactics

The wood burning industry also **promotes “harm reduction” measures as a way to benefit themselves,** and this list can just as easily apply to them.

In the US, the [HPBA has an online “toolkit” aimed at policymakers](#) to **promote wood stove changeouts.** They present themselves as partners with policymakers, promoting **new wood stoves** as a way for regulators and public health authorities to improve air quality, despite [ample evidence that certified wood stoves are not the solution the industry claims.](#)

Members of the wood burning industry position themselves as “part of the solution” to the air quality problems their products helped create.

**Indeed, the Stove Industry Alliance uses the social media hashtag “#PartOfTheSolution.”** The Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue Association of Canada proclaims on its Comox Valley campaign website that “Clean burning wood stoves are part of the solution.” It’s a phrase the industry repeats to promote themselves and certified wood stoves.

**Weakening and Undermining Regulatory Controls**

**In the UK,** smoke control areas, also known as “smokeless zones,” were set up under the Clean Air Act to protect the public from pollution from solid fuel burning. But [exemptions have been made](#) to allow certified wood stoves in these areas, under the misguided belief that they are less polluting than they actually are.

When officials in [Montreal, Canada](#) announced their intention to ban wood-burning stoves and fireplaces, the wood burning industry lobbied successfully for [an exemption for certified wood stoves](#), undermining restrictions on wood burning.

Another Campaign and More Industry Claims

In [Western Australia, the City of Nedlands](#) Council voted in 2021 to [start an advisory period aimed at eventually banning wood heating](#). It was subsequently discovered that the city did not have the authority to enact a ban, but the [Australian Home Heating Association](#) leaped into action anyway.

They launched an aggressive campaign to [shut down any talk of a possible ban](#), which they [boasted about on their website](#). They claimed their members only sell “high tech wood heating solutions that continue to provide [lower emissions](#),” making any further restrictions unnecessary. They also attempted to [create doubt that modern wood stoves could pose a health risk](#) to people with asthma, even though, in fact, [each new certified wood stove in Australia is estimated to increase health costs](#) (PDF) by thousands of dollars each year, and [experts have pointed out that current Australian wood heater standards are insufficient to protect health](#) (PDF).

These are just a few examples of how claims about certified wood stoves are used to manufacture doubt and undermine regulatory controls against wood smoke pollution.

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[\[HPBA\] Government Affairs works for us behind the scenes in Washington and protects our businesses from too much regulation.](#)

A business co-owner, talking in an HPBA promotional video, [Advocacy](#).

An Industry [“Partnership Program”](#)

Another example of how the wood burning industry has been able to [cozy up to regulators](#) and reframe themselves as “part of the solution” while undermining efforts for effective health-protective measures against wood smoke pollution, can be seen with the US EPA’s [Burn Wise program](#).

Burn Wise and the Wood Burning Industry

[Burn Wise is a “voluntary partnership program” with the wood burning industry](#), and its web pages largely reflect the industry’s views.

The [HPBA logo sits alongside that of the EPA on Burn Wise promotional materials](#), and the [Burn Wise website has links not just to HPBA, but to other wood burning industry groups and trade organizations as well](#).

Burn Wise is a “partnership program” with the wood burning industry. [Many people don’t realize that much of the content on this EPA website reflects the views of the industry the EPA is meant to be regulating.](#) (Image: US EPA)

[Cozy UK Industry](#) and Government Relationships

Similarly in the UK, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ([Defra](#)) has a close relationship with the industry it is supposed to be regulating.

“Extraordinary Government Failings”

The group [Clean Air in London](#) has investigated the [“cosy world of the wood stove industry and its regulators,”](#) describing [“extraordinary government failings” that “risk another ‘dieselgate’ or ‘woodgate.’”](#)

[Clean Air in London](#) notes that [Defra appointed HETAS \(the Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme\) to be the “official body recognized by the government to approve solid fuel burning heating appliances, fuels and services.”](#) [Clean Air in London](#) points out that [“HETAS provides the webpages about UK Smoke Control Areas for Defra’s website.”](#)

[HETAS was, “until at least March 2021,” a member of the Stove Industry Alliance,](#) according to [Clean Air in London](#). On its own website, [HETAS refers to the wood burning industry as “our industry.”](#)

[Members of the UK wood stove industry also run the “clearSkies” emissions certification scheme,](#) which they describe as [“objective and independent.”](#)

[The Australian Wood Burning Industry’s Influence on Regulators](#)

In Australia, the AHHA boast about their influence on the government and the agencies that are meant to be regulating them. In [a promotional video](#), they state:

Working with key government departments, the AHHA ensures our voice is heard, and all three levels of government are kept informed of developments which affect our market. This includes working with bodies such as [Standards Australia](#), which are responsible for developing the stringent standards which wood heaters need to meet in Australia and New Zealand. The [Association also works with local councils and state EPAs](#) to ensure these standards are regulated correctly...

The Australian Air Quality Group pointed out in their report [16 Incorrect and Misleading Claims by the AHHA](#) (PDF) that the AHHA dominates the Standards Australia Committee with their own members. They also describe how the claims the AHHA makes about “stringent standards” are misleading.

A Precedent for Change

It is worth noting that the US government, as well as governments in other parts of the world, continued to support the tobacco industry until long after cigarette smoke was known to be harmful.

According to historian Sarah Milov, “For most of the 20th century, the federal government was [regulating on behalf of tobacco and, in many ways, against consumer protection from tobacco.](#)”

Non-Smokers’ Rights Were Being Violated

According to Milov, “What really changes the tide was [the idea that non-smokers had rights that were being violated in the public sphere.](#)”

Everyday people [grew increasingly fed up with being forced to breathe smoke-filled air](#) and organized, eventually leading to changes in attitudes and policies around the world.

Smoke is smoke. It’s time for regulators and others to stop putting the interests of the wood burning industry before everyone else’s right to breathe clean, healthy air.

Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates, see <https://RAWSEPresidents.wordpress.com> and click on the nearest right icon for the latest month, June 2023, of PDFs of articles with U R L’s to search on. To the right of that, Games such as 1)Bingo for RAWSEP, 2)Crosswords for RAWSEP, 3)EndWoodSmokeJeopardy, 4)EndWoodSmokeMonopoly Games, 5) a RAWSEP Flyer, 6)the Un-Twist-it Game, and 7)“Vending Machines for PM2.5 monitors”, and icon links to 30 minute Youtube videos and Spotify podcasts as well as podcasts on Amazon Music Prime (free for Prime subscribers), [podcasts.google.com](https://podcasts.google.com), Cast Box, and Pocket Cast (Pocket Cast is only free on the phone App. Pocket Cast works on Apple phones) and, below those icons, icon links to monthly PDFs of articles with URL’s to search on, from May 2023 to May 2022.



# Burn Wise

Program of U.S. EPA

[www.epa.gov/burnwise](http://www.epa.gov/burnwise)

