

## Media Release

28 February 2012: Government announcement on unflued gas heaters in schools provides more

questions than answers [Download our latest media release](#) in response to [Adrian Piccoli's announcement](#) here.

## February 2012 Update

COUGH is extremely disappointed by the release of the 2011 NSW Government's Environmental Health Risk Assessment of School Heating Options report (ERM).

This report concludes that 'on the basis of the results of the specialist studies it is concluded that unflued gas heaters do not need to be replaced' and 'there is no urgency to replace unflued gas heaters'.

This runs contrary to the recommendations of the Woolcock study report (2010) sponsored by the NSW Government which found: 'Seeking alternative, effective and efficient sources of domestic and public space heating that does not have adverse effects on health is important'. <http://www.woolcock.org.au/Default.aspx?tabid=108&itemId=292>

And COUGH believes that these Woolcock report findings were in fact conservative as the winter was very mild and the heaters tested were in use much less frequently and for shorter

durantions than in a normal winter.

### Other Emissions Not Measured

COUGH is also concerned that carbon monoxide emissions (a poisonous gas emitted by unflued gas heaters) were not measured in the Woolcock report. The report did find that "...No2 and formaldehyde levels were substantially higher in classrooms during the operation of "low NOx" unflued gas heaters."

The ERM report itself states: 'If unflued gas heaters were removed from school classrooms and replaced with one of the alternative heater option (which are all equivalent in health terms), it is estimated that there would be 84,945 days of wheeze avoided over a 25 year period. Pg 37 <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/about-us/news-at-det/media-centre/media-releases/release-of-unflued-gas-heaters-report>

"This report is basically saying we know these heaters create health issues but there is no way we can justify replacing them due to the cost involved," says COUGH spokesperson Richard Kalina.

"Where do the children of NSW and their health fit in all of this? What about school staff and volunteers with respiratory conditions or sensitivities? The ERM report has shown clearly that unflued gas heating is the only heating option to affect children's health (we already knew this) and impact the health system but has stated this is tolerable.

"Is this what it has come to in NSW – that it's okay for children to wheeze and get sick due to heating in their classrooms because it will cost too much to fix?" asks Richard Kalina.

Previous Australian and overseas studies have shown unflued heaters in classrooms and in homes generate unhealthy air (i.e. above the World Health Organisation recommended levels, Australian & USEPA Standards). Australian studies include:

- a. NSW Health, Hunter & New England Region, 2005

- b. [Professor Pilotto and others, 2007](#)
- c. [CSIRO \(Brown\)](#)
- d. CSIRO/NSW Department of Commerce, 2008 (Blackheath)
- e. Ferrari (NSW SPCC) 1989, Ferrari and Fleer, 2003

## **REPLACEMENT HEATERS IN 101 SCHOOLS**

COUGH has been receiving anecdotal evidence that the replacement of unflued gas heaters in 101 schools completed in 2011 has been a great success.

This replacement program was driven by the previous state government and saw unflued gas heaters replaced with flued systems in classrooms and school halls in the coldest areas of the state.

Anecdotal reports include less tiredness, less coughing, no more migraines and a much safer environment which supports children and teachers in their valuable work.

## **Some Background**

**2011**

**9 June 2011 UPDATE:** [click here](#) for our latest media release

The *Sydney Morning Herald* has again brought the issue of removing unflued gas heaters from ALL schools in NSW back into the news: [click here](#) to read the story.

The campaign continues: [contact us](#) to find out how your school can become a supporter! And click here to find [a plan of action](#) if your school missed out.

## 2010

### The Woolcock report

In July 2010 the long-awaited Woolcock report was released: ‘An investigation into the short-term impact of exposure to “low NOx” unflued gas heaters in classrooms on the children’s symptoms and lung function and on indoor air quality”.

The report’s summary concluded that it was important that ‘seeking alternative, effective and efficient sources of domestic and public space heating that does not have adverse effects on health is important’. The report found wheeze in children increased with so called low NOx unflued heaters. COUGH believes the results are very conservative due to the report’s methodology and the fact that the report was conducted at the end of a warmer than usual winter.

The report can be found [here](#) .