

MINISTER FOR HEALTH
ACT Health

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY QUESTION
Question No 160

Appearing on Notice Paper No. 15 of 2 April 2008

Ms Bresnan: To ask the Minister for Health

- (1) Has ACT Health started monitoring the 2.5 particulate air quality in Tuggeranong, pursuant to the recommendation of studies undertaken for the new data centre; if not, when does the Department plan to start.
- (2) If the monitoring has started, what are the results of the measurements and are the results within safe levels.
- (3) What standards are the ACT Government referring to in declaring what are safe levels.
- (4) What are ACT Health's long-term plans to monitor 2.5 particulate air quality in Tuggeranong, particularly once the data centre comes into operation.

Ms Gallagher: I am advised that the answer to the Member's question is

- (1) Monitoring of PM_{2.5} fraction commenced at the ACT Health Monash air quality monitoring site in June 2003. In 2005 and 2006, as part of the wood-smoke initiative, a network of specific air monitors which monitor for PM_{2.5} was set up across the ACT. This information is provided in the Chief Health Officer's 2006 Report at page 68.
- (2) The PM_{2.5} monitoring results are published infrequently in various reports, such as the Chief Health Officer's Report or the ACT State of the Environment Report. For example, the PM_{2.5} monitoring results at the Monash site for the period July 2004 to June 2006 are published at page 62 of the Chief Health Officer's 2008 Report. PM_{2.5} data for the ACT is also reported in the National Environment Protection Council's (NEPC) Annual Report 2007-2008 at pages 192-193.

ACT Health collects air quality data (including PM_{2.5} monitoring results) for the Environment Protection Unit of the Department of the Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water. The Environment Protection Unit is the custodian of the data and the regulatory authority in relation to air quality in the ACT.

- (3) The questions whether the results are within safe levels and what standards are the ACT Government referring to in declaring what are safe levels are not simple to answer. The Ambient Air Quality National Environment Protection Measure - Air NEPM (the national standard) sets uniform standards for six common air pollutants (i.e. carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, lead and particles) in Australia.

In relation to particles, the national standard requires monitoring and reporting of results for particles that are 10 micrometres in diameter (PM₁₀). Due to new scientific findings concerning health effects of PM_{2.5}, the national standard was varied in 2003 to add an advisory reporting standard for PM_{2.5}, which does not have a timeframe for compliance associated with it (i.e. this is a temporary standard and jurisdictions do not have obligations to comply with it). The goal was to gather sufficient data nationally to facilitate a review of the national standard, which is currently underway.

I am advised that the national standards were set on the basis of available scientific studies of air quality and human health. Australian conditions (i.e. climate, geography and demographics) were taken into account in estimating the likely exposure of Australians to these major air pollutants. The national standard requires jurisdictions to monitor levels of the six specified air pollutants and report on their performance concerning the reduction of these levels. The national standard does not give a safe or unsafe level guide for air pollutants including particulates. I am advised that there is insufficient scientific evidence to suggest a threshold below which no adverse health effects may occur. Consequently, the ACT Government does not declare any level as safe or otherwise in relation to PM_{2.5}.

- (4) ACT Health continues to monitor PM_{2.5} fraction at the ACT Health Monash air quality monitoring site.

Approved for circulation by the Minister for Health – Katy Gallagher MLA

Signature:



Date:

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