

## **Shonky science**

It doesn't matter whether you live in the smokiest parts of a Central township, or at the far end of a country road, you do need to be careful about how you use your fireplace or wood burner. Smoke is bad, and in the winter-polluted townships, especially bad. No argument with that.

But to claim, as our regional council does, that air pollution kills four people every year in Alexandra is just nonsense. As a Canadian specialist on this topic once said: show me the bodies.

Being cold is a much more lethal threat to family health. Shivering in freezing rooms because you're afraid to light the fire is a much greater health risk, especially for the old and the very young.

Linking respiratory illnesses to pollution for each of Otago's small townships is also a statistical jack up. Every scientist knows that correlation is not causation, and that population health is a combination of many factors, not just air quality.

The regional council's warm home initiatives are great, and they've improved the wellbeing of thousands of Otago people, but that doesn't give them the license to misuse science to make their points about air pollution.

Of course clean air is a good thing, and we should all play our part to achieve it. If you've got a respiratory illness, you shouldn't be breathing dirty air. But on balance, cold is much worse. Using shonky science to frighten us into not lighting our fires is bad public policy.

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