

# Smog kills 1400 Sydneysiders

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**SYDNEY'S polluted air is contributing to the deaths of up to 1400 people a year, NSW Health chiefs admitted yesterday.**

Revealing pollution's deadly toll, they warned the smog was contributing to the deaths of asthmatics and victims of chronic respiratory and cardio-vascular illnesses. Pollution was also a factor in about 3 per cent of all lung cancer deaths in the Sydney basin.



SYDNEY'S polluted air is contributing to the deaths of up to 1400 people a year. This is the skyline earlier this month. / The Daily Telegraph.

Despite the revelations, environment officials said testing could not be done for ultrafine pollution particles, which penetrate deep into lung tissue and accumulate in the body.

Chief health officer Denise Robinson told a public inquiry at Parliament House that between 600 and 1400 deaths every year could be attributed at least partly to Sydney's foul air.

Dr Robinson and Environmental Health director Michael Staff could not produce data comparing Sydney's pollution mortality record with other cities.

Nor could they provide accurate figures showing if the death rate was declining or how it compared to a decade ago.

Dr Staff said it was difficult to identify smog as a cause of deaths because there were numerous factors involved.

He told the inquiry into health impacts of air pollution in the Sydney basin the deaths needed to be considered "in context with other illnesses".

Upper House Democrat Arthur Chesterfield-Evans later accused NSW Health of failing to take the issue seriously.

"We can now say how many people die from tobacco-caused cancers and in accidents on the roads," he said.

"But no one has yet given us a breakdown on where the pollution comes from – cars, airports and industrial plants."

Department of Environment and Conservation atmospheric science manager Chris Eiser told the inquiry that no testing could be done for ultrafine pollution particles smaller than 2.5 microns (thousandths of a millimetre).

"We don't measure those ultrafine particles – no one around the world does on a regular basis," Mr Eiser said, adding that the technology was not widely available.

Asthma Foundation NSW chief executive Greg Smith said ultrafine particles were a growing concern because new, more efficient car engines were producing smaller and smaller particles.

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"Particle pollution doesn't just induce an asthma attack, it can kill you," Mr Smith said.

"Australian and overseas studies concur that more people die from pollution related illness than in car accidents."

Mr Smith said he was concerned ultrafine particles were not being measured.

"Given the already massive health and economic implications of pollution we need to know the true extent of pollution in this city as it impacts on a large number of health conditions," he said.

Former US vice-president and global warming campaigner Al Gore – in Sydney yesterday to promoting his new film *An Inconvenient Truth* – said he was not surprised by the alarming figures.

"I haven't seen the study but those numbers are not out of keeping with what you would find in large cities," he said.

Government figures show the number of vehicles on the roads has increased by 60 per cent in 20 years.