# Brighton council’s wood smoke claims challenged amid conflicting DEFRA data



Brighton and Hove City Council's "Cosy Killer" campaign, launched in December, aimed to raise awareness about the health risks associated with solid fuel burning, particularly wood stoves and open fires. The council asserted that smoke particles from domestic burning contribute to 1 in 20 deaths among residents over 30 and claimed that wood burning produces more small particle emissions than all UK road traffic combined. This campaign employed digital billboards and sparked significant public discourse about air quality and health risks within the community.

However, the campaign came under scrutiny when the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) issued an "advice notice" after it received a complaint disputing the accuracy of these claims. The ASA noted that advertisers must provide adequate evidence when making objective assertions about public health. In the case of Brighton's campaign, the authority indicated that the council should not state these claims if they cannot be comprehensively supported by data.

Brighton chimney sweep Rob Whittingdon contested the council's assertion that wood burning produces more emissions than road traffic, referencing recent data from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). February reports from DEFRA indicated that road transport actually released more PM2.5 and PM10 emissions than domestic combustion in 2023. Whittingdon expressed concern over the council's failure to retract or clarify their statements after they withdrew the claim during the campaign, emphasising the importance of basing public health statements on the latest evidence to ensure accurate information is disseminated to the public.

In response to the criticisms, Councillor Tim Rowkins from the council defended the original claims, suggesting they were supported by DEFRA and Public Health England research. He stated, "All the statements included in this campaign were substantiated… based on research which is available in the public domain." He maintained that the comparison of emissions from solid fuels to those from road traffic was accurate according to the 2022-23 DEFRA data. However, he acknowledged that new figures were released in February 2025, which prompted an update to the campaign materials.

The debate surrounding solid fuel burning and its implications for public health has become increasingly pertinent in light of changing emissions data. Recent studies have revealed that wood burning stoves contributed 29% of total PM2.5 emissions in 2022, showcasing their significant role in domestic air pollution. Just a decade prior, emissions from wood burning were around 22%, reflecting a worrying trend in increasing household fuel combustion. Meanwhile, road transport accounted for only 18%, further complicating the narrative surrounding the sources of air pollution.

With the popularity of wood-burning stoves on the rise, combined with pressures to address air quality, local authorities are under obligation to inform the public accurately about health risks. As Councillor Rowkins affirmed, local councils have a duty to raise awareness of these risks, especially in urban settings where pollution can reach higher levels.

Moreover, studies highlight that while emissions from other sectors have decreased over the years, the escalation in wood-burning usage has counteracted some of these reductions in overall particulate pollution levels. This dilemma presents a challenge for policymakers aiming to balance public health recommendations with the realities of domestic energy choices.

As Brighton continues to navigate this complex issue, the effectiveness and accuracy of its public health messaging will be crucial in shaping community understanding and behaviour regarding air quality and health protection.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: 1
2. Paragraph 2: 1
3. Paragraph 3: 1, 6
4. Paragraph 4: 1, 3
5. Paragraph 5: 1, 6, 5
6. Paragraph 6: 1, 6
7. Paragraph 7: 4, 7
8. Paragraph 8: 1, 2, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25159279.notice-issued-brighton-council-cosy-killer-campaign/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/emissions-of-air-pollutants-emissions-of-air-pollutants-in-the-uk-summary> - This UK government report provides comprehensive statistics on air pollutant emissions, including particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), from various sources such as domestic combustion, road transport, and industrial processes. It highlights trends from 1990 to 2023, noting significant reductions in emissions over the years. The report emphasizes the contributions of domestic combustion and road transport to PM2.5 emissions, offering detailed data on emission sources and their respective shares in total emissions.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/emissions-of-air-pollutants-emissions-of-air-pollutants-in-the-uk-particulate-matter-pm10-and-pm25> - This UK government publication presents detailed statistics on emissions of particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) in the UK from 1990 to 2023. It outlines the contributions of various sectors, including domestic combustion, road transport, and industrial processes, to total PM emissions. The report provides insights into the trends and sources of particulate matter emissions, highlighting the significant role of domestic combustion in PM2.5 emissions and the impact of road transport on PM10 emissions.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-and-environment-statistics-2024/domestic-air-pollution-emissions-from-transport-in-2022> - This UK government report focuses on domestic air pollution emissions from transport in 2022. It provides statistics on emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx), PM2.5, and PM10 from road transport, highlighting the contributions of exhaust emissions and non-exhaust sources such as brake and tyre wear. The report also discusses the long-term trends in emissions from transport, noting significant reductions since 1990 and the impact of stricter vehicle standards on emission levels.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/14/wood-burning-stoves-cancel-out-fall-particulate-pollution-uk-roads> - This article discusses the environmental impact of wood-burning stoves in the UK, highlighting how their increasing popularity is offsetting reductions in particulate pollution from road transport. It cites data showing that emissions from domestic wood burning contributed 22% of PM2.5 emissions in 2022. The article also mentions the rise in sales of wood-burning stoves and the associated health risks due to increased air pollution.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/government-pms-defra-b2496173.html> - This news article reports on the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) data indicating that emissions from domestic wood burning have increased by 56% over the past decade, contributing 29% of total PM2.5 emissions in 2022. It also highlights that road transport is responsible for 18% of PM2.5 emissions. The article discusses the implications of these findings for air quality and public health.
* <https://www.cieh.org/ehn/environmental-protection/2022/march/defra-data-cuts-wood-burner-emissions-but-action-is-still-needed/> - This article examines DEFRA data indicating a reduction in the estimated proportion of small particle pollution produced by wood burners from 38% to 17%. Despite this decrease, domestic wood burning still outweighs emissions from UK road traffic, which accounts for 13% of particle pollution. The article emphasizes the need for continued action to address air quality issues related to wood burning and discusses the health risks associated with particulate matter emissions.