

UMass Amherst | Wood Smoke and Public health

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Here in Massachusetts we're making choices on what types of fuel we use to keep us warm. Wood has been used for hundreds of years in Massachusetts. But now new technologies in the form of pellets of compressed wood make modern wood-heating much more convenient. But we do not yet know whether burning this form of wood is harmful to public health.

Most adults take around 20,000 breaths per day. In each breath, we inhale hundreds or thousands of different particles. And some of the particles can make us quite sick. Poor air quality is linked to the premature death of more than 8 million people worldwide.

In the U.S. more people die of air pollution than they do from car accidents. With support from UMass Clean Energy Extension, our mobile air quality sampling laboratory is working to answer this question. Inside this truck we have air pollution research equipment that measures the chemicals found in air. These data will be able to tell us whether or not pellet emissions can be harmful for our community. And knowing this information is important for policymakers, industry leaders, scientists, and families. This is research that matters.

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