

Health concerns from two weeks of smoke in southern Queensland

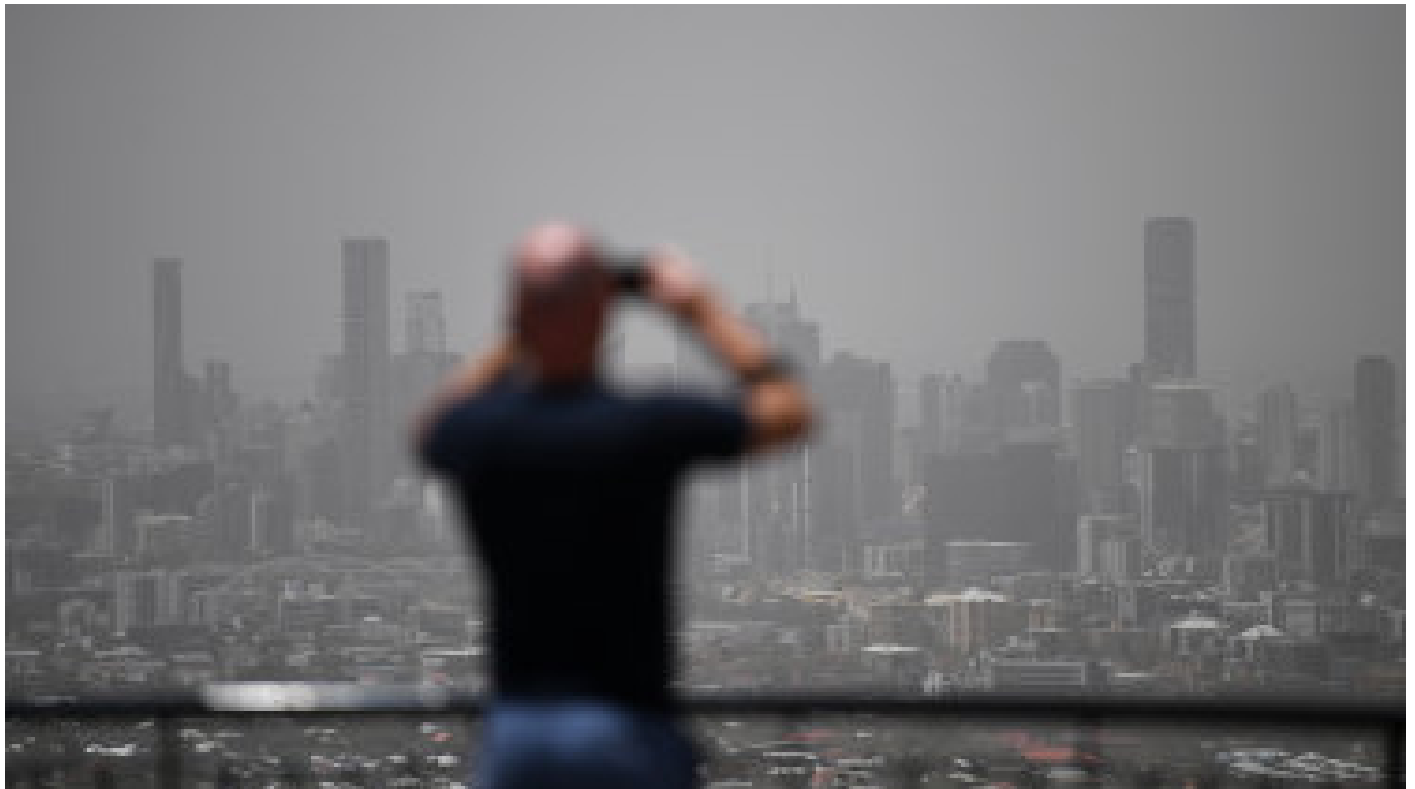
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By [Stuart Layt](#) November 21, 2019 — 9.51pm

South-east Queensland's air quality has been at levels dangerous to health for nearly a fortnight as a result of smoke from bushfires burning across the region.

The ongoing poor air quality prompted the nation's peak body for asthma awareness to issue a warning to sufferers to be on the alert for signs they were getting into trouble after the extended period of bad air.



Brisbane and large parts of southeast Queensland have been covered with smoke haze for several days as a result of bushfires. *CREDIT: DAN PELED/AAP*

The level of microparticles in the air was six times greater than normal on Thursday, and had reached as high as 10 times normal levels since the fires began.

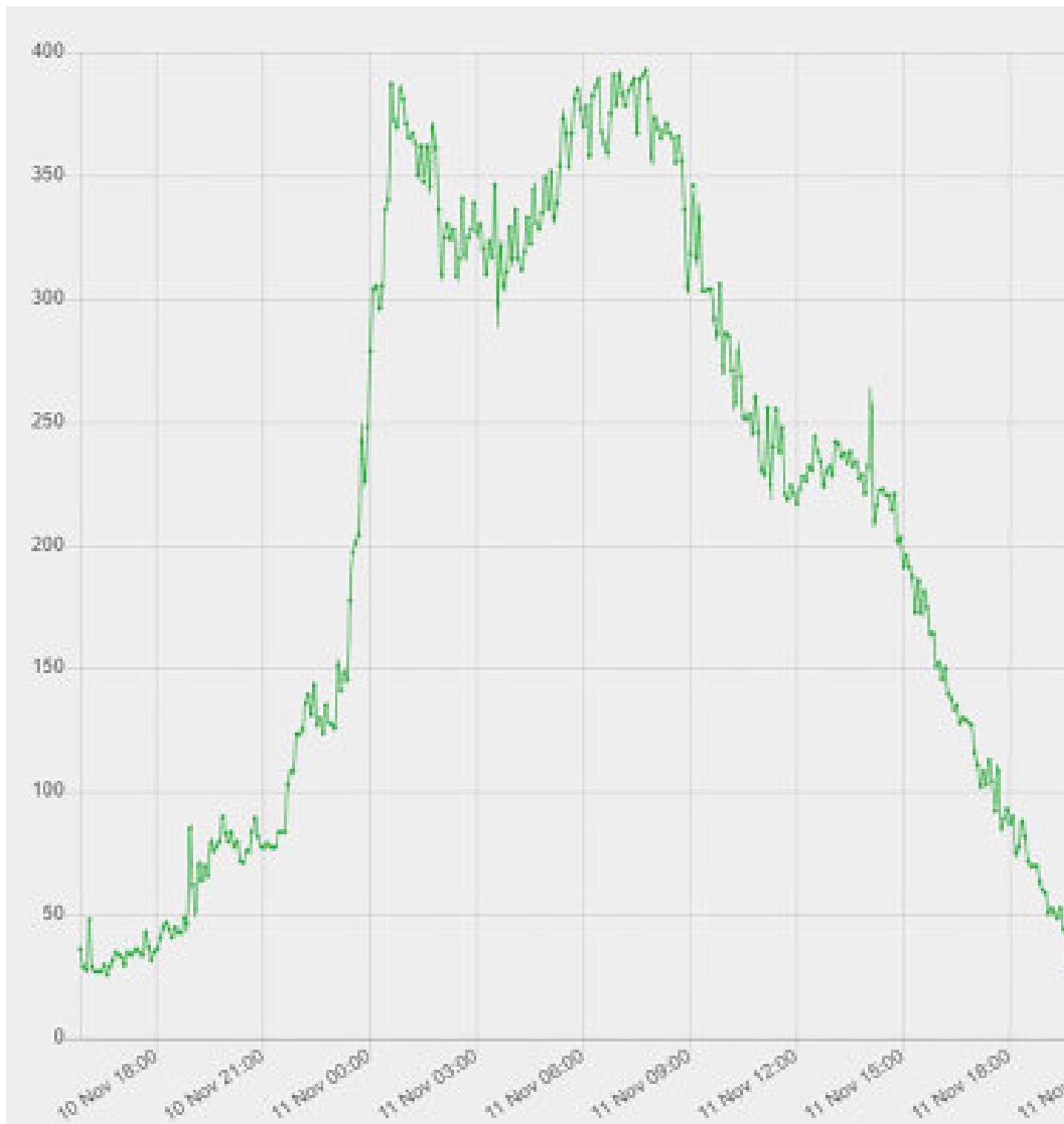
National Asthma Council Australia chief executive Siobhan Brophy said with such an

extended period of poor air quality, people with existing conditions needed to be especially careful.

“Older people and kids can be affected as well as asthmatics, basically anyone whose lungs aren’t as strong,” she said.

“If you are starting to experience problems with your breathing then take steps straight away.

“Don’t just hope it will go away.”



QUT data shows how the level of particles in the air jumped as smoke from the bushfires began to drift over the region nearly two weeks ago. CREDIT: QUT

Professor Zoran Ristovski, from QUT's international laboratory for air quality and health, said the issue was with the microparticles in the smoke, which were much smaller than those found in a dust storm and a greater potential risk.

"Because they're smaller, firstly they can make it further into your lungs and cause irritation," Dr Ristovski said.

"These small particles can also pass the cell barrier and from there into the bloodstream."

Dr Ristovski said in addition to lung irritation this could result in oxidative stress to cells, which puts stress on the heart. Prolonged exposure had been linked to certain cancers, although usually over months and years, not weeks.

As fires started to take hold in earnest on Saturday, November 9, large plumes of smoke blanketed greater Brisbane in a smoky haze.

Queensland health issued a health warning for people with existing respiratory issues over that weekend, and then [on Monday November 11 issued a general health warning](#) for all residents in Brisbane, Ipswich and the Gold Coast.

"This is quite unprecedented; we don't see such large areas which have such a poor level [of air quality]," Queensland chief health officer Jeanette Young said at the time.

Queensland Health downgraded its advice a few days later from a general health warning back to a warning for people with existing conditions.

On that Monday, Dr Young said authorities had already seen "increased" numbers of people presenting at hospitals with respiratory issues after just two days of smoky air.

Queensland Health said on Thursday it was still seeing increased numbers, but did not yet have accurate data on the exact number of presentations to make public.

QUT maintains a network of air quality sensors, called KOALA (Knowing Our Ambient Local Air-quality) sensors.

A normal level of particles in the air in Brisbane is around 10 units (micrograms of particles per one cubic metre of air).

On Monday, November 11, the sensors around Brisbane measured values up to 400 units, the highest level since a large dust storm hit the city in 2009.

The state environment department maintains its own network of air quality sensors, with