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To Be Honest, Wood is Good

The truth about heating your home with wood

Heating Canadian homes with wood evokes a great deal of passion and emotion in this fair land of ours. For some, it is a life style choice representing the oldest and purest form of keeping warm throughout our long winters. It supplies an attachment to our ancestors, a link to a simpler and more wholesome past. Others believe wood heating has no place in a modern Canada where air quality can become a major concern.

But at least for a moment, let us put emotion aside and look at the facts.

Heating with wood is not a peripheral activity in our country. Nearly one third of all Canadian households contain a wood burning appliance and while for some it is purely decorative, for many it is their principal, and sometimes only, method of heating their homes. Many communities do not have access to natural gas, and heating with oil, propane or electricity may be beyond the budget of many Canadians. Few believe that the cost of oil and propane will do anything other than rise steeply in the years to come. The recent move by electricity utilities to charge even higher rates for peak daytime use will only make that form of heating more expensive as well. Sales of wood burning appliances are on the increase and that should not come as a surprise to anyone, but this being the case, what are the implications for air quality?

New technology appliances burn cleaner

There is good news in this regard. The fact is that localized air quality issues associated with wood burning are almost always caused by old, outdated wood stoves or older technology outdoor wood boilers that have been inappropriately sited or incorrectly operated. New technology wood stoves are a world apart from their older counterparts. They emit up to 90% less particulate matter and only trace amounts of other chemicals. These new stoves are approved by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) in the US and also fulfill the requirements of CSA (Canadian Standards Association) B415 here in Canada. This technology is so impressive there is a federal rebate available for anyone who wishes to change out their old stove for a new EPA/B415 approved model. Nearly every province and territory in Canada matches this federal rebate, meaning that a total of up to \$700 is often available. One might wonder why governments would be doing this if they were not convinced of the clean burning credentials of modern wood burning appliances.

We are indeed fortunate here in Canada to have several world class wood burning appliance manufacturers developing cleaner burning appliances at the cutting edge of technology. They are part of a billion dollar hearth industry representing thousands of

manufacturing jobs and exporting to all corners of the world. We should all be proud of this Canadian success story. As more and more older style appliances are replaced by new technology models, concerns regarding general air shed quality will diminish.

Wood burning is virtually carbon neutral

There are other tangible benefits that we as Canadians should recognize as being derived from residential wood heating. Wood is a renewable resource that does not contribute to global warming. The major cause of global warming is the increasing amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide that has been trapped far beneath the surface of the earth for millions of years is now being released through our use of fossil fuels (natural gas, oil). Wood is not a fossil fuel. The carbon dioxide released through combustion is equal to the amount the tree has absorbed as it grows. Providing forests are managed in a sustainable way, which is almost always the case in our country, the amount of carbon locked up in the forests remains the same. Wisely managed, this represents a huge and immensely valuable fuel resource for Canada in perpetuity. It is completely renewable, virtually carbon neutral and is completely independent from the whims of foreign governments. While wood and other biomass cannot fulfill all of our future energy requirements, it would be wise to consider them as important components in our future energy mix. Not only is this energy source independent, it also represents tens of millions of dollars in local, largely rural economies.

In conclusion, perhaps we should neither romanticize wood burning nor demonize it. Maybe it is time to understand and appreciate how blessed we are to have both the fuel and technology at our disposal. It should never run out and will be there for our grandchildren and beyond.

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About the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association of Canada (HPBAC)

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association of Canada (HPBA), based in Huntsville, Ontario, is the Canadian industry association for manufacturers, retailers, distributors, representatives, service firms and allied associates for all types of hearth, barbecue and patio appliances, fuels and accessories.

For an extensive list of advance combustion woodstove dealers or to speak with a HPBAC member, contact HPBAC at 1-800-792-5284 or visit hpbacanada.org