

Connecticut Association of Directors of Health
Testimony In Support of Raised Bill No. 84: An Act Concerning Outdoor Wood Furnaces
To the Distinguished Co-Chairs and Members of the Environment Committee
February 22, 2012

Good afternoon, distinguished co-chairs and members of the Environment Committee. My name is Patrick McCormack and I am President of the Connecticut Association of Directors of Health (“CADH”) and Director of the Uncas Health District, serving the towns of Bozrah, Griswold, Lisbon, Montville, Norwich, Sprague and Voluntown.

CADH supports *Raised Bill No. 84: An Act Concerning Outdoor Wood Furnaces* (“OWFs”) but with significant concern that the bill does not go far enough to adequately protect the public’s health. The scientific literature concludes that volatile organic compounds and small particulate matter, such as wood smoke, endanger the health of those exposed. Potential adverse health outcomes from exposure include increased coughing and difficulty breathing; decreased lung function; aggravated asthma; development of chronic bronchitis; irregular heartbeat; nonfatal heart attacks; and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.¹

Smoke generated by OWFs is uniquely harmful, relative to smoke generated by other wood-burning activities. The basic design of OWFs causes fuel to burn incompletely, often resulting in thick smoke and high particulate emissions. Moreover, unlike other wood-burning activities, OWFs burn continuously, further elevating the extent of particulate emissions. In short, wood smoke from OWFs presents a significant public health threat.

Currently, local health departments are regularly asked to investigate complaints from residents adversely affected by wood smoke. Even units that meet the separating distance and stack height requirements under current law² are included among these reports. The current requirements are not only insufficient to protect the public’s health from OWF emissions but also challenge the resources of local public health departments, which must investigate every complaint.

The adverse health affects of OWFs are present year-round. Prohibiting the use of wood-burning furnaces between May first and September thirtieth is a step in the right direction. But the majority of complaints regarding OWFs occur in the *winter* months, when use of OWFs is greatest. Only a year-round prohibition on the use of OWFs can adequately protect the public’s health.

Connecticut law currently does not regulate particulate matter emission levels for OWFs. Until such time that the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection may establish emissions standards that adequately protect the public’s health and that OWF technology has evolved to meet those standards, CADH supports *Raised Bill No. 84: An Act Concerning Outdoor Wood Furnaces* only as a step toward ultimately protecting the public year-round from the significant threat of wood smoke.

CADH is a nonprofit organization comprised of Connecticut’s 77 local health departments and districts. Since its incorporation in 1996, CADH has and continues to convene, engage, mobilize, and support Connecticut’s local health departments and districts to strengthen and assure efficient and effective delivery of public health services. Local health directors are the statutory agents of the Commissioner of Public Health and are critical providers of essential public health services at the local level in Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Environmental Protection Agency. *Health Effects of Breathing Woodsmoke*. Available at <http://www.epa.gov/burnwise/pdfs/woodsmoke_health_effects_jan07.pdf>. Accessed December 28, 2010.

² Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 22a-174k(b).