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Can you see or smell smoke? New tools harness citizen science to reduce the impacts of bushfire smoke on our communities

A new feature of the popular AirRater smartphone app, developed by the University of Tasmania's Menzies Institute for Medical Research, will harness the power of citizen science to help reduce the impacts of bushfire smoke on Australian communities.

Launched today, the updated AirRater app now includes a 'smoke reporting tool' to crowd source reports of smoke from bushfires and planned burns. The reports will feed directly into the smoke forecasting system called AQFx, developed by CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, in collaboration with the Bureau of Meteorology and Australian universities. This feature will help fire and air quality managers around Australia understand how smoke is moving in the landscape.

"Our research estimates over 400 people died from the impacts of bushfire smoke during the Black Summer bushfires," said Professor Fay Johnston, chief investigator of the AirRater project.

"As a community, we need to get better at making sure people have the information they need when it is smoky.

"By downloading AirRater and reporting bushfire smoke, people can help us understand how bushfire smoke is moving and impacting communities in real time," she said.

As well as providing a tool for the community to contribute smoke reports, for the first time, the AirRater app will also provide members of the public with access to real-time information sourced from AQFx.

"AQFx is an Australian developed and focused air quality forecasting system," said CSIRO Air Quality Scientist Dr Fabienne Reisen.

"The cutting-edge system uses Bureau of Meteorology weather forecasts, information from state and territory environment department air quality sensors, satellites, fire information and now, the smoke reports from AirRater.

"This update will enable the Australian public to access AQFx air quality modelling for their region using the AirRater app. This is important for members of the community who are particularly vulnerable to smoke such as children, the elderly and people with asthma and heart disease.

For Australians living far from government air quality monitors, it will mean vastly improved estimates of smoke pollution, particularly during bushfire events."

AirRater is free to download and available in iOS and Android versions from www.airrater.org. AirRater upgrades and the national AQFx system have been funded by the

Australian Government. AirRater is also funded by the Tasmanian Department of Health, ACT Health and the NT Department of Health, and developed by the University of Tasmania's Menzies Institute for Medical Research in collaboration with CSIRO.

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