

# New South Wales Air Quality Statement 2014

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## Improved air quality in NSW during 2014

**NSW air quality was better during 2014 than 2013, due mainly to a decrease in the number and extent of bushfires, despite record temperatures and below average rainfall, particularly in the northeast.**

Air quality in NSW is generally good by international standards and has been steadily improving over time.

While levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide continue to be below national standards set by the National Environment Protection Council (Department of the Environment, 2014), levels of ozone and particles (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) can exceed the standards from time to time.

Ozone and fine particle pollution levels are affected by:

- the annual variability in the weather
- natural events such as bushfires and dust storms
- the location and intensity of local emission sources, such as coal mines, wood heaters, transport and industry.

After poorer air quality in 2013 due to an extended period of severe bushfires, air quality across much of the state was better in 2014.

## NSW climate in 2014

**For NSW, 2014 was the warmest year on record. Rainfall was well below average in the northeast, and close to average elsewhere.**

NSW had its warmest year on record in 2014 with maximum and minimum temperatures both well above average and significant heatwaves in January, May, October and November (BOM 2015).

The year began with the driest summer in NSW for almost 30 years, and the fifth warmest summer on record (BOM 2014a). Autumn started with a wet and cloudy March, with drier and warmer conditions emerging during late April and May, and finished with a record breaking late season warm spell (BOM 2014b). During winter both maximum and minimum temperatures were above average, while rainfall was close to normal across much of the state (BOM 2014c). Spring was warm and dry, with the warmest daytime temperatures on record and the lowest spring rainfall in more than 10 years (BOM 2014d).

## Air Quality Index

**Most parts of NSW experienced good air quality during 2014. The Air Quality Index was in the very good, good or fair category for at least 93 per cent of the time in the Sydney, Lower Hunter and South-west Slopes regions and close to 100 per cent of the time in all other regions.**

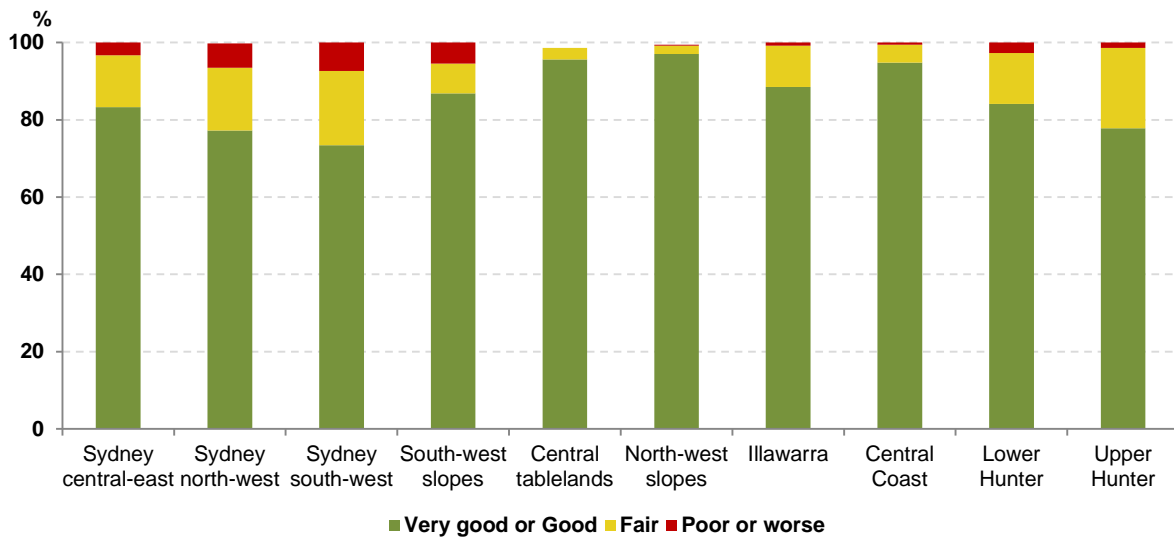
The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) uses the Air Quality Index (AQI) to provide a simple comparison of pollutants affecting air quality. The AQI standardises measurements of ozone, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, air particles and visibility into one easy-to-understand index. Find out more [about the AQI](#) on the OEH website.

An AQI of 100 or above indicates that one or more air pollutants have exceeded relevant standards. AQI values above 200 indicate that air quality is in the hazardous category, and people sensitive to air pollution are advised to avoid all outdoor physical activities.

AQI values were in the very good or good categories for more than 73 per cent of the time and in the fair category for up to 19 per cent of the time in each of the Sydney, Lower Hunter and South-west Slopes regions, showing that the national standards were often met (at least 93 per cent of the time) (Figure 1).

There were 14 distinct days when AQI levels were in the hazardous category, 11 of these in Sydney and three in the South-west Slopes. The majority of these days were associated with smoke from bushfires and hazard reduction burns. The maximum (and by far the highest) AQI value was 1270 on 26 May 2014 at Oakdale in South-west Sydney, caused by a large hazard reduction burn only two kilometres west of the station (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: 2014 AQI categories as a percentage of time in each region**



**Note:** The Upper Hunter AQI levels in this graph are based on Muswellbrook and Singleton data

## Ozone pollution

**Ozone levels above the national standards were recorded on five days in Sydney during 2014. High ozone levels were widespread in the region on 31 January and on 23 November during hot conditions.**

Ozone levels in the Illawarra, Lower Hunter and Central Coast regions remained below the standards throughout 2014.

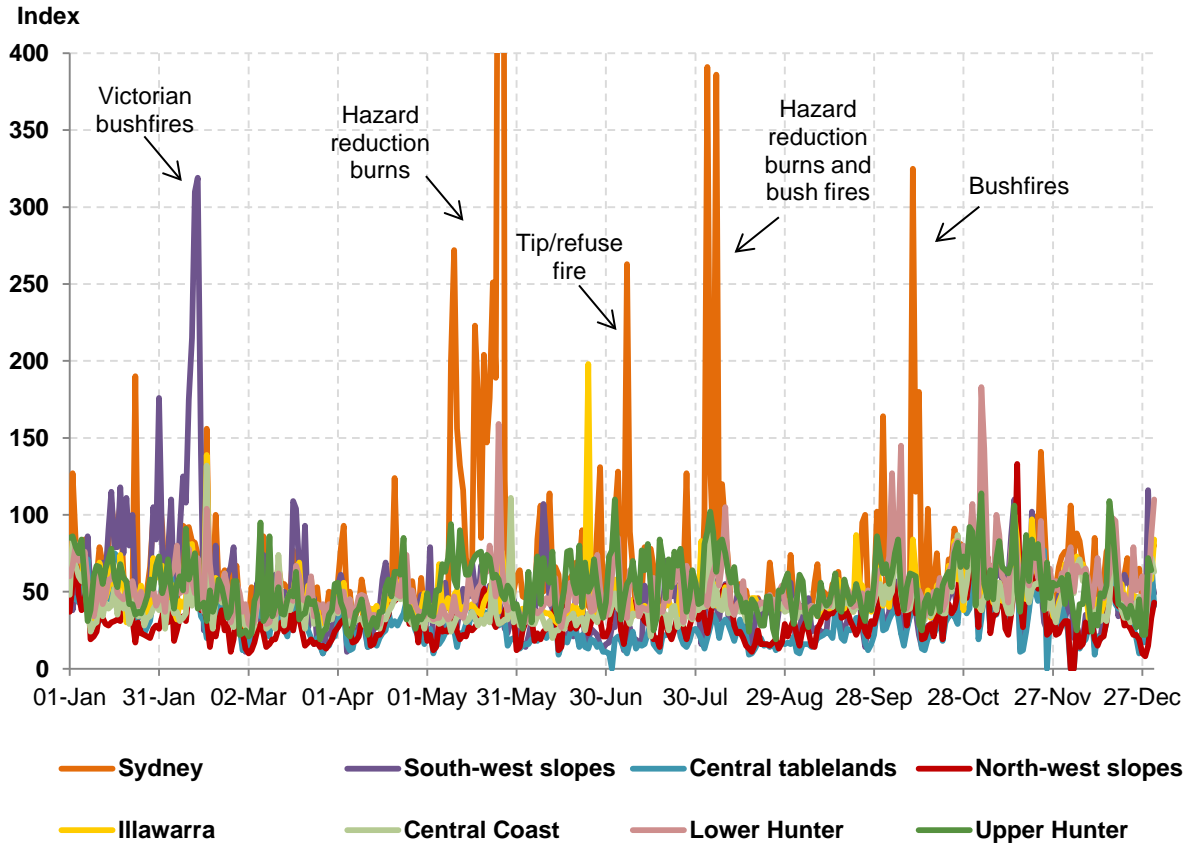
Sydney saw five days with ozone levels above national standards, with the most significant events on 31 January and 23 November when ozone levels above the national standards were seen across much of western Sydney (Table 1).

On 31 January, 1-hour average ozone reached 11 parts per hundred million (pphm) at Oakdale and the 4-hour average peaked at 9.3 pphm at Bargo (Table 1). The day was hot with temperatures reaching 36°C and light easterly winds.

23 November saw the highest ozone of the year with the 1-hour average peaking at 12.4 pphm at both Bringelly and Campbelltown West, and the 4-hour average reaching 11.3 pphm at Bringelly (Table 1). This day saw extremely high temperatures with a maximum of

45.3 °C at Richmond and 44 °C in other parts of western Sydney as very hot air from inland Australia blew across Sydney ahead of a trough.

Figure 2: Regional AQI time series during 2014



Note: The Sydney AQI levels in this graph are based on Sydney Central-east, Sydney South-west and Sydney North-west data, and the Upper Hunter AQI levels are based on Muswellbrook and Singleton data

Table 1: Days above the 1-hr and 4-hr ozone standards in Sydney – 2014

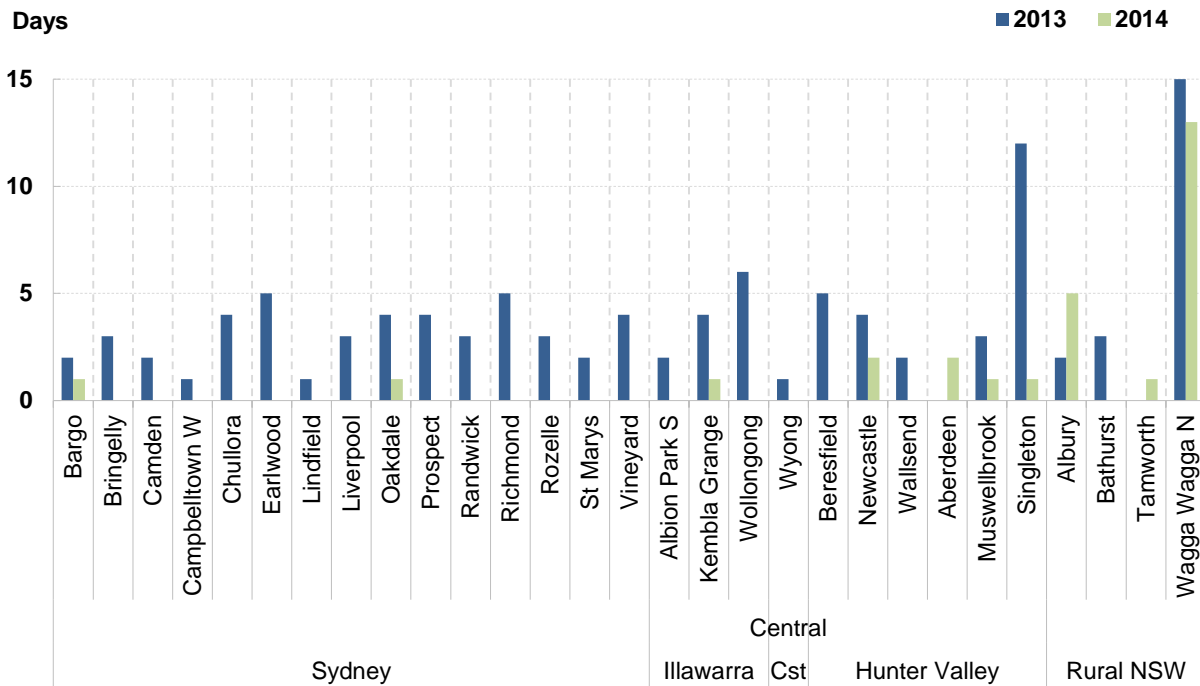
Date	Stations where 1-hour average ozone standard exceeded (10 pphm)	Stations where 4-hour average ozone standard exceeded (8 pphm)
15/01/2014	Bargo (10.1)	Bargo (8.7)
18/01/2014	-	Camden (8.5)
31/01/2014	Bargo (10.5), Bringelly (10.2), Camden (10.8), <u>Oakdale (11.0)</u>	<u>Bargo (9.3)</u> , Bringelly (8.9), Camden (8.8), Campbelltown West (9.0), Oakdale (8.8), St Marys (8.5)
23/11/2014	<u>Bringelly (12.4)</u> , Camden (12.3), <u>Campbelltown West (12.4)</u> , Liverpool (10.3), Prospect (10.3), Vineyard (11.2)	Bargo (8.6), <u>Bringelly (11.3)</u> , Camden (11.0), Campbelltown West (11.1), Liverpool (8.7), Prospect (9.7), St Marys (8.4)
03/12/2014	-	Bringelly (8.5)

## Particle pollution

Particle levels met the national goal for PM<sub>10</sub> at all stations except Wagga Wagga, but levels above the PM<sub>2.5</sub> standards were recorded in Sydney, the Hunter Valley and Wagga Wagga.

Fewer exceedences of the PM<sub>10</sub> national standards were recorded during 2014 than in 2013 (Figure 3), which was a result of fewer bushfires.

Figure 3: Comparison of days above the PM<sub>10</sub> standard – 2013 and 2014



PM<sub>10</sub> levels above the national standard of 50 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m<sup>3</sup>) were recorded at only a small number of monitoring stations (Table 2). The maximum daily PM<sub>10</sub> was 159.6 µg/m<sup>3</sup> recorded at Albury on 13 February during the Victorian bushfires.

To allow for variability in natural events, the national goal allows for up to five days each year when PM<sub>10</sub> can be above the standard. Using this approach, it is the sixth highest daily value for the year that determines if a site complies with the goal. By this measure, Wagga Wagga North was the only station to not meet the national goal in 2014 with 13 days above the daily PM<sub>10</sub> standard, which is similar to 2013 (Figure 3). Wagga Wagga particle levels are impacted by broad-scale agricultural activities (including stubble burning) and wood smoke emissions during the cooler months.

Table 2: Summary of 24-hr PM<sub>10</sub> observations in NSW – 2014

Region/Station	Maximum daily average PM <sub>10</sub> values				Days above standard
	Highest (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Date of highest value	6 <sup>th</sup> highest (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Date of 6 <sup>th</sup> highest value	
<b>Sydney</b>					
Bargo	<b>50.8</b>	29/09/2014	29.2	27/10/2014	1
Bringelly	42.6	19/05/2014	33.7	06/08/2014	0
Camden	41.4	11/02/2014	32.2	17/12/2014	0
Campbelltown West	49.4	21/11/2014	35.2	12/02/2014	0
Chullora	40.0	06/08/2014	35.1	31/12/2014	0
Earlwood	45.2	10/02/2014	38.5	18/12/2014	0
Lindfield	38.3	11/10/2014	31.5	06/10/2014	0
Liverpool	40.8	12/02/2014	36.8	03/07/2014	0
Oakdale	<b>56.3</b>	25/05/2014	31.6	10/02/2014	1
Prospect	44.3	10/02/2014	34.5	03/07/2014	0
Randwick	46.1	10/02/2014	39.9	31/12/2014	0
Richmond	40.0	10/02/2014	33.5	25/05/2014	0
Rozelle	43.8	10/02/2014	39.2	31/12/2014	0
St Marys	45.0	06/08/2014	36.5	11/02/2014	0
Vineyard	41.9	03/08/2014	33.3	31/12/2014	0
<b>Illawarra</b>					
Albion Park South	48.3	20/11/2014	37.7	14/11/2014	0
Kembla Grange	<b>99.2</b>	24/06/2014	37.8	26/05/2014	1
Wollongong	45.3	31/10/2014	40.0	10/02/2014	0
<b>Central Coast</b>					
Wyong	41.9	02/01/2014	35.8	30/12/2014	0
<b>Lower Hunter</b>					
Beresfield	45.4	17/12/2014	39.9	22/05/2014	0
Newcastle	<b>53.7</b>	31/10/2014	41.2	30/10/2014	2
Wallsend	43.4	17/12/2014	37.7	06/10/2014	0
<b>Upper Hunter</b>					
Aberdeen	<b>50.4</b>	17/12/2014	39.3	27/02/2014	2
Muswellbrook	<b>53.0</b>	15/11/2014	42.8	03/11/2014	1
Singleton	<b>54.5</b>	17/12/2014	43.3	19/11/2014	1
<b>Rural NSW</b>					
Albury	<b>159.6</b>	13/02/2014	40.0	18/01/2014	5
Bathurst	42.8	17/12/2014	37.4	23/11/2014	0
Tamworth	<b>66.6</b>	15/11/2014	35.8	27/10/2014	1
Wagga Wagga North	<b>88.2</b>	31/01/2014	<b>57.7</b>	15/01/2014	13

**Note:** Levels above the PM<sub>10</sub> standard of 50 µg/m<sup>3</sup> are shown in **bold**.

During 2014, daily PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels above the advisory reporting standard (ARS) of 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> were recorded in the Hunter Valley and South-west Slopes regions (Table 3). Muswellbrook recorded most days above the standard (three days), followed by Wagga Wagga North (two days) and one day at Beresfield, Camberwell and Singleton.

The maximum daily average PM<sub>2.5</sub> was 31.6 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, measured at Camberwell on 4 November. On 3-4 November, all sites in the Upper Hunter recorded their highest or second highest PM<sub>2.5</sub> values of the year as smoke from a number of bushfires burning in the Wollemi and Yengo National Parks was blown into the valley (RFS 2014).

Annual average PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels above the ARS of 8 µg/m<sup>3</sup> were recorded in Sydney (Chullora and Liverpool), Lower Hunter (Newcastle) and the Upper Hunter (Muswellbrook). Muswellbrook recorded the highest annual average (9.7 µg/m<sup>3</sup>) followed by Chullora (9.0 µg/m<sup>3</sup>).

Compared with 2013, significantly fewer stations exceeded the PM<sub>2.5</sub> reporting standards during 2014 (Figure 4), due mainly to fewer major bushfires through the year.

**Figure 4: Comparison of days above the daily PM<sub>2.5</sub> reporting standard – 2013 and 2014**

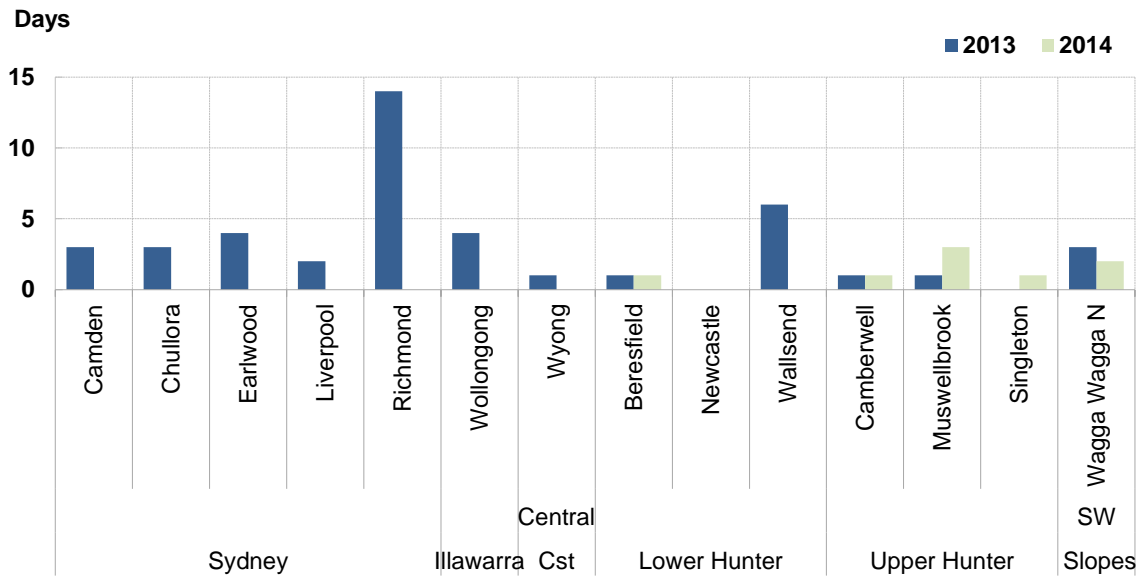


Table 3: Summary of 24-hr PM<sub>2.5</sub> observations in NSW – 2014

Region/station	Annual average	Daily average PM <sub>2.5</sub> (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )				Days above daily ARS
		Maximum	Date of maximum	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest	Date of 2 <sup>nd</sup> highest	
<b>Sydney</b>						
Camden	6.3	18.5	12/10/2014	18.2	13/10/2014	0
Chullora	<b>9.0</b>	23.1	12/10/2014	22.1	09/08/2014	0
Earlwood	7.8	22.7	09/08/2014	19.5	06/08/2014	0
Liverpool	<b>8.6</b>	24.3	03/07/2014	21.3	12/10/2014	0
Richmond	6.7	24.7	06/08/2014	22.1	25/05/2014	0
<b>Illawarra</b>						
Wollongong	7.0	17.3	14/11/2014	16.8	25/10/2014	0
<b>Central Coast</b>						
Wyong	5.5	19.7	31/10/2014	16.0	29/05/2014	0
<b>Lower Hunter</b>						
Beresfield	7.5	<b>26.2</b>	09/08/2014	19.0	04/11/2014	1
Newcastle	<b>8.1</b>	21.2	04/07/2014	20.7	31/10/2014	0
Wallsend	6.7	18.0	31/10/2014	17.0	03/07/2014	0
<b>Upper Hunter</b>						
Camberwell*	7.8	<b>31.6</b>	04/11/2014	24.6	03/11/2014	1
Singleton	7.8	<b>28.5</b>	04/11/2014	21.3	03/11/2014	1
Muswellbrook	<b>9.7</b>	<b>27.4</b>	04/07/2014	<b>27.4</b>	04/11/2014	3
<b>Rural NSW</b>						
Wagga Wagga North	7.5	<b>27.6</b>	04/02/2014	<b>26.7</b>	09/06/2014	2

\* Small Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network community monitoring station

**Note:** Levels above the daily (25 µg/m<sup>3</sup>) or annual (8 µg/m<sup>3</sup>) ARS for PM<sub>2.5</sub> are shown in **bold**.

## Focus: Hunter Valley air quality

Like other regions, Hunter Valley air quality was better during 2014 compared to 2013, mainly as a result of fewer bushfires.

While levels of ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide remained below national standards, fine particle levels in the Hunter Valley did exceed national standards.

Observations from the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network (UHAQMN) indicate that annual average PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels in Muswellbrook are higher than at other locations in the Hunter Valley. PM<sub>10</sub> levels at the Upper Hunter monitoring stations that are closer to mines are also generally higher than elsewhere in the region.

## Larger population centres

Monitoring at larger population centres in the Hunter Valley during 2014 showed that:

- The maximum daily average PM<sub>10</sub> in the Upper Hunter was 54.5 µg/m<sup>3</sup> (Singleton – 17 December) and 53.7 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in the Lower Hunter (Newcastle – 31 October).
- Daily average PM<sub>10</sub> levels were above national standards on four days (Table 4). A small bushfire in the Muswellbrook LGA (RFS 2014) may have contributed to high levels on 15 November, while a dust storm originating from south-west inland NSW contributed to high levels on 17 December.
- All Hunter stations met the PM<sub>10</sub> goal of less than six days over the standard (Table 2).
- Muswellbrook, Singleton, Camberwell and Beresfield recorded PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels above the daily national standard, while Newcastle and Muswellbrook both recorded PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels above the annual standard (Table 3).
- Across the Hunter there were four days during 2014 when daily PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels exceeded the reporting standard (Table 5), compared to eight days during 2013.
- Smoke from bushfires caused widespread particle pollution in the Upper Hunter on 4 November. High daily PM<sub>2.5</sub> at Muswellbrook on other days occurred overnight under calm conditions, and was most likely from smoke from residential wood fires.

**Table 4: Days above the PM<sub>10</sub> standard at Hunter Valley large population centres – 2014**

Date	Stations exceeding the daily average PM <sub>10</sub> national standard of 50 µg/m <sup>3</sup>
04/10/2014	Newcastle (53.5)
31/10/2014	Newcastle (53.7)
15/11/2014	Aberdeen (50.1), Muswellbrook (53.0)
17/12/2014	Aberdeen (50.4), Singleton (54.5)

**Table 5: Days above the PM<sub>2.5</sub> reporting standard at Hunter Valley stations – 2014**

Date	Stations exceeding the daily average PM <sub>2.5</sub> ARS of 25 µg/m <sup>3</sup>
04/07/2014	Muswellbrook (27.4)
05/08/2014	Muswellbrook (25.4)
09/08/2014	Beresfield (26.2)
04/11/2014	<b>Camberwell (31.6)</b> , Muswellbrook (27.4), Singleton (28.5)

**Key:** Large population centre, **Small community site**

The new Newcastle Local monitoring network was established during 2014 to provide additional air quality information to local communities in the vicinity of the Newcastle Port. Since the commissioning of each site, the particle levels have exceeded daily national standard at Mayfield on three days (since 30 July); Carrington on three days (since 2 August); and Stockton on 18 days (since 29 October).

The Stockton station is located close to the coast and high PM<sub>10</sub> levels at the station are often associated with easterly winds and sea salt spray. The contribution of sea salt to



particle levels in the Newcastle Local area will be better understood once the Lower Hunter Particle Characterisation Study is complete. More information on the study can be found at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/aqms/lowhunterparticle.htm>.

### **Small community and diagnostic sites**

Although comparing data from small community and diagnostic stations in the UHAQMN with Air NEPM standards is not recommended, OEH recognises that there is a desire within the community to assess how pollution levels at these stations compare with the standards. Table 6 summarises daily PM<sub>10</sub> data from the smaller community, background and diagnostic stations within the UHAQMN.

During 2014, there were 26 days in the Upper Hunter when PM<sub>10</sub> levels above the benchmark were recorded at one or more stations (Table 7), compared to 48 days in 2013. Eighty nine per cent of these events (23 days) occurred exclusively at stations designated as small community and/or diagnostic sites. Camberwell, Jerrys Plains, Maison Dieu and Singleton NW recorded the greatest number of days when levels were above the benchmark.

The most widespread event occurred on 15 November, when eight stations reported levels above the daily PM<sub>10</sub> standard. This day was hot and dry with temperatures in the valley reaching 39°C and winds light and variable at the start of the event ahead of a change bringing fresh south-easterly winds. The highest level of 67.7 µg/m<sup>3</sup> was measured at Wybong, which is the nearest station to a small bushfire that occurred at that time at Sandy Hollow (RFS 2014).

**Table 6: Summary of PM<sub>10</sub> levels at Upper Hunter small community, background and diagnostic sites – 2014**

Station	Maximum daily average PM <sub>10</sub> values				Days above benchmark
	Highest (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Date of highest value	6 <sup>th</sup> highest (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Date of 6 <sup>th</sup> highest value	
<b>Small community</b>					
Bulga	<b>54.3</b>	16/01/2014	45.9	04/01/2014	3
Camberwell	<b>79.7</b>	14/11/2014	<b>57.8</b>	27/10/2014	11
Jerrys Plains	<b>64.4</b>	11/01/2014	<b>50.8</b>	03/11/2014	6
Maison Dieu	<b>63.7</b>	21/11/2014	<b>52.7</b>	15/11/2014	6
Warkworth	<b>67.9</b>	16/01/2014	47.5	04/01/2014	3
Wybong	<b>67.7</b>	15/11/2014	47.4	10/11/2014	3
<b>Background sites</b>					
Merriwa	<b>55.2</b>	17/12/2014	41.1	01/02/2014	3
Singleton South	44.8	01/11/2014	39.1	27/10/2014	0
<b>Diagnostic sites</b>					
Mount Thorley	<b>58.0</b>	09/07/2014	46.1	06/01/2014	3
Muswellbrook NW	<b>50.8</b>	15/11/2014	42.3	03/01/2014	1
Singleton NW	<b>64.7</b>	31/10/2014	<b>52.8</b>	27/10/2014	6

**Note:** Levels above the daily average PM<sub>10</sub> standard of 50 µg/m<sup>3</sup> are shown in **bold**.

**Table 7: Days above the PM<sub>10</sub> benchmark in the Upper Hunter – 2014**

Date	Stations exceeding daily average PM <sub>10</sub> of 50 µg/m <sup>3</sup>
02/01/2014	Maison Dieu (53.1)
03/01/2014	Merriwa (50.9), Warkworth (50.6), Wybong (62.6)
11/01/2014	Jerrys Plains (64.4)
16/01/2014	Bulga (54.3), Jerrys Plains (54.7), Warkworth (67.9)
19/01/2014	Jerrys Plains (53.5)
10/02/2014	Wybong (52.2)
19/05/2014	Singleton NW (57.6)
26/05/2014	Singleton NW (54.0)
27/05/2014	Maison Dieu (54.5)
24/06/2014	Camberwell (53.5)
09/07/2014	Mount Thorley (58.0)
30/09/2014	Camberwell (65.9)
05/10/2014	Camberwell (53.5)
13/10/2014	Camberwell (63.4)
27/10/2014	Camberwell (57.8), Maison Dieu (54.8), Singleton NW (52.8)
28/10/2014	Camberwell (53.2)
29/10/2014	Camberwell (57.2), Singleton NW (54.0)
31/10/2014	Camberwell (78.9), Maison Dieu (57.8), Mount Thorley (54.5), Singleton NW (64.7)
01/11/2014	Camberwell (61.6)
03/11/2014	Jerrys Plains (50.8)
04/11/2014	Jerrys Plains (52.0), Warkworth (50.4)
14/11/2014	Camberwell (79.7)
15/11/2014	Aberdeen (50.1), Bulga (53.2), Jerrys Plains (53.0), Maison Dieu (52.7), Merriwa (55.0), Muswellbrook (53.0), Muswellbrook NW (50.8), Wybong (67.7)
21/11/2014	Camberwell (57.7), Maison Dieu (63.7), Mount Thorley (57.3)
24/11/2014	Bulga (52.5)
17/12/2014	Aberdeen (50.4), Merriwa (55.2), Singleton (54.5), Singleton NW (54.8)

**Key:** Large population centre site, Small community site, Diagnostic site, Background site

## Further information

Data from the NSW air quality monitoring network is updated hourly and made available online by the OEH at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/AQMS/aqi.htm>. You can also subscribe to automated email and/or SMS air pollution alerts at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/aqms/subscribe.htm>.

Information about sources of emissions in NSW is available from the NSW Air Emissions Inventory:

<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/air/airinventory.htm>

<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/air/airemissionsinmycommunity.htm>

Information about the principles and programs used in NSW to manage particle pollution is available at <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/air/20130784ManPartStr.htm>

Information about sources and actions to reduce emissions in the Upper Hunter:

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/aqms/uhaqmnfpcs.htm>.

<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/aqms/130158uphuntap.htm>

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RFS 2014, ICON database, accessed December 2014

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