

# Reputation up in the air

By AMY PATTERSON

## AN INTERNATIONAL expert on air pollution is surprised at Auckland's poor air.

American air quality expert Michael Walsh visited Auckland last week, after briefing officials at Parliament about New Zealand's air.

"The air pollution levels are higher than I expected," Mr Walsh says.

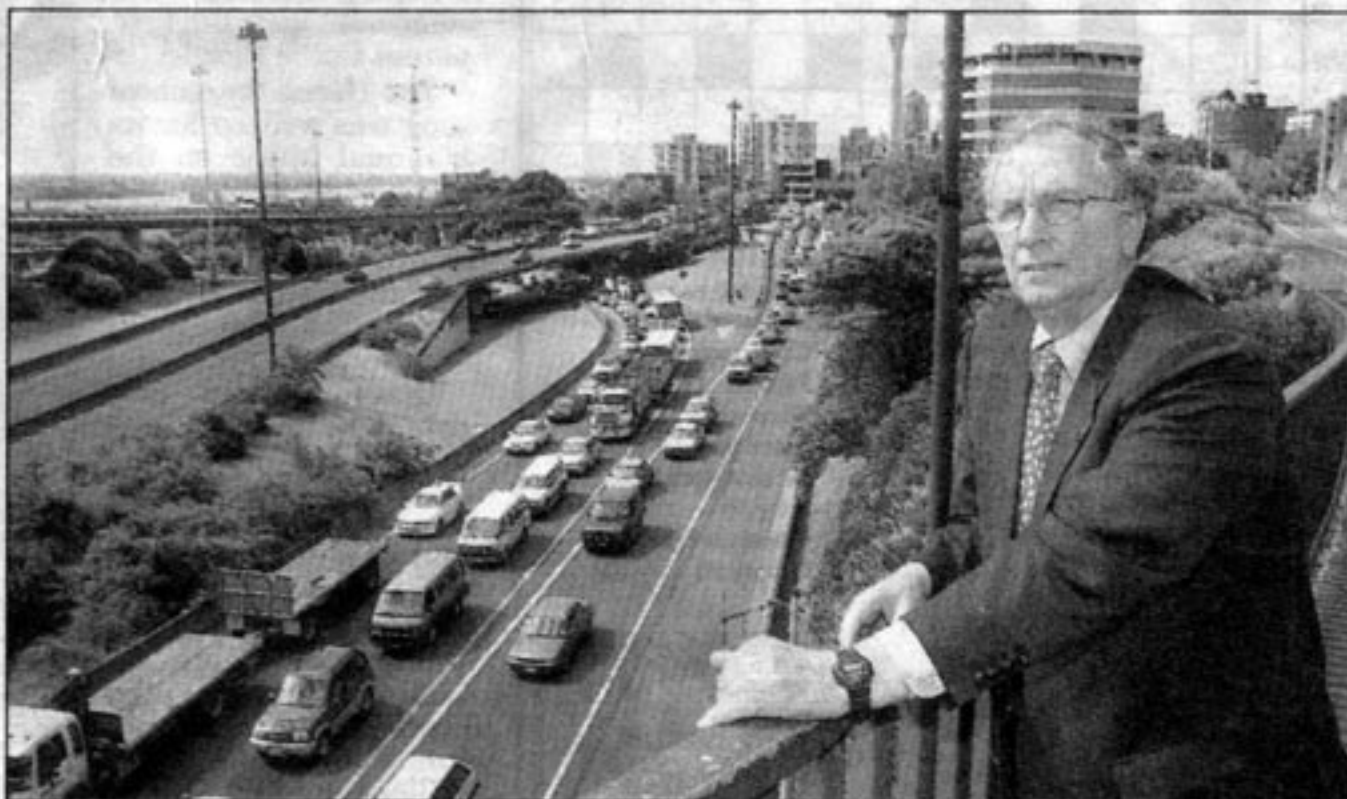
"Clearly the impression of this area, of the whole country, is that this is a very clean and green country and place."

The main culprits are minute particles emitted from vehicles and fires, that lodge in people's lungs. Each particle is a fraction the size of a human hair.

These fine particles contain a carbon core with attached toxins that cause health problems, particularly among people with asthma, bronchitis, or heart disease.

Asthma affects one in six New Zealanders, whose symptoms are made worse by pollution.

"I was surprised to see that you have high air pollution on the one side, and high asthma on the other, and yet are not doing anything about it," Mr Walsh says.



**AIR APPARENT** Air quality expert Michael Walsh says New Zealand does not live up to its clean, green reputation when it comes to air pollution.

Photo: JASON OXENHAM

There are no standards for vehicle emissions, a factor that puts New Zealand behind many Third World countries.

In Europe and Asia, 90 per cent of cars have catalytic converters, which reduce the

carbon monoxide from fuel.

People in some countries wear masks to protect themselves from smog. But Mr Walsh says masks are useless against fine particles.

"Those white things people put over their faces, they just capture the big particles. There's no easy way to protect yourself," he says.

The only way to clear the air is with tougher controls on vehicles. These include improving fuel quality, tuning vehicles regularly, installing catalytic converters and, ideally, driving less.

"The good news here is I think you could have a significant impact on reducing pollution if these simple steps were taken," Mr Walsh says.

Vehicles emissions cause 80 per cent of air quality problems in Auckland.

The Auckland Regional Council measures nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and particles at four central Auckland locations.

These have exceeded World Health standards at times.

ARC air quality scientist Jayne Metcalfe says the city's worst pollution is recorded at the Khyber Pass air monitor.

There are also monitors at the corner of Queen St and Wyndham St, Penrose, Mt Eden's Kelly St, and five other locations in the Auckland region.

The ARC will have sensors on city roads in April and May, letting motorists know how much pollution comes from each car.

Mr Walsh briefed ARC councillors and scientists on ways to improve air quality in Auckland. He presented air quality research at a public meeting, last Tuesday.