

Candidate Responses on Air Quality: CVRD Electoral Areas

Breathe Clean Air circulated a questionnaire on air quality to all candidates running in the local government elections in the Comox Valley in 2026.

This document shares results from candidates in the Comox Valley Regional District Electoral Areas A, B and C. Please visit our website at www.breathcleanair.ca/election2026 for responses from candidates in other areas.

The questions and responses from each candidate are below, along with additional comments provided by some of the candidates.

Notes on the questionnaire and results:

- *All candidates were sent at least one reminder to complete the survey.*
- *Many candidates replied to the survey in full. Others did not, while others skipped certain questions. All questions to which a candidate did not reply are marked "didn't reply."*
- *Candidates who had no publicly available online contact details, or whose details could not be found, are marked as "no contact info."*
- *Candidates' responses are provided in full and are unedited.*

Question 1

Every winter, the Comox Valley experiences poor air quality due to high levels of harmful fine particulate matter from wood stoves. We experience air quality advisories and frequently break BC Air Quality Objectives. We are one of the worst communities of 13 monitored in the Georgia Strait Air Zone. Everyone's health can be impacted by poor air quality, particularly children, seniors, and people with pre-existing conditions.

Are you concerned about wood smoke in the Comox Valley and how it is affecting people's health?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Norm McPhail (C)		My platform for Area C focuses on the practical, everyday realities facing our local residents. Because local government must balance environmental health with economic survival, a simple binary format cannot adequately capture the nuance required for effective policy. While I fully support clean air and the long-term health of our community, Area C faces an ongoing energy and cost-of-living crisis where many rural families rely on wood heat as an affordable and necessary utility. Consequently, I cannot support restrictive regional bans or regulations that penalize working families without viable, fully publicly funded alternatives for rural properties.
Gillian Anderson (C)	Yes	I am concerned about pollution all over the Valley, particularly its effect on children and people with respiratory and heart issues.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Didn't reply	
Richard Hardy (B)	Didn't reply	
Danial Arbour (A)	Yes	Yes, dating back to my first term in 2018 I have supported efforts to reduce wood smoke in the Comox Valley, including actively supporting the creation of the Airshed Roundtable.
Ariel Becherer (C)	Didn't reply	

Question 2

The development of the Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable Action Plan involved local governments, health authorities, industry groups, environmental non-profits, and community members. The plan's goals included a reduction of existing wood-burning appliances and their emissions, a transition away from wood-burning appliances in densely populated areas, along with a reduction of yard waste burning, promotion of alternatives, and expanded research data on particulate mater.

If elected, will you work toward fulfilling the 2023 Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable Action Plan?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Norm McPhail (C)	Yes	
Gillian Anderson (C)	Yes	I can see there has been a lot of good work done on the document.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Didn't reply	
Richard Hardy (B)	Didn't reply	
Danial Arbour (B)	Yes	Yes I am in favor. I believe and new board and council should have this item for review after 3 years, to understand what has worked and not worked so far in terms of implementation.
Ariel Becherer (C)		We can fine irresponsible burners by giving the power of enforcement to our fire departments, as well as putting out advisories on inversion days.

Question 3

Yard waste fires create harmful localized smoke, impacting neighbours' use and enjoyment of their own property as well as their health. Although yard waste fires have been banned in Comox, Courtenay, and Cumberland, they are allowed in the rest of the CVRD and are impacting both neighbours and neighbouring communities. (BC regulates larger open burns and agricultural waste fires and these are not the focus of this question).

If elected, what alternative methods of brush disposal will you support in order to decrease the high levels of air pollution regional district citizens are exposed to?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Name	Answer	Comments
Norm McPhail (C)	Didn't reply	.
Gillian Anderson (C)		We need to make it easier for people to dispose of yard waste to go for composting (difficult if you don't have a truck or trailer). Would have to look at the economics of regular yard waste pickup. Perhaps a depot that is closer than the landfill, that's a fair drive for people in Area C. Workshops on composting that address preventing use by rats. A branch pile is wonderful habitat for birds, especially in winter! Perhaps limiting time periods for outdoor burning.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Didn't reply	
Richard Hardy (B)	Didn't reply	
Daniel Arbour (A)		I have actively supported annual firesmart yard waste pickup in the rural areas. This has been very popular with residents across Area A. However with the Province withdrawing funding to much of the firesmart program, we may come to a fork in the road where we will have to consider whether we should fund this through local government. I think having CVRD staff review options, including discussions on synergies between waste management pickup and the chipping service through the fire departments would be worth pursuing.
Ariel Becherer (C)	Didn't reply	

Question 4

Our summers are increasingly vulnerable to wildfire smoke. The danger to property and the potential for lost lives is real. While our ability to reduce wildfires in the summer is bound up with much larger climate change issue, our ability to reduce the same kind of smoke hazard in the winter is within our reach.

If elected, what will you do to reduce winter wood smoke pollution in the Comox Valley?

ELECTORAL AREAS A, B, and C

Norm McPhail (C)		Managing a regional airshed requires a comprehensive approach that addresses global atmospheric movements and wildfire smoke, rather than isolating domestic homeowners. I advocate for collaborative, incentive-based programs over punitive enforcement
Gillian Anderson (C)		A fair bit of backyard burning seems to take place in winter, even in rain or when everything is soaked wet, and often burning garbage and construction waste! More information on 'hazard' burning: I was horrified once to come across a pile of burning electrical wire on a rural property, with the air smelling of something I assumed must have been very toxic, and children playing with the fire, breathing it all in. We need to inform people about the health and ecological dangers of burning garbage and the problems with burning wet material. We need to look at forestry slash pile burning - is there a better way? More education about using a wood stove efficiently would continue to improve air quality, and continuing with the rebate program to replace older wood stoves is an excellent idea.
Arzeena Hamir (B)	Didn't reply	
Rich Hardy (B)	Didn't reply	
Daniel Arbour (A)		I believe future rebate for heat pumps could focus on primary wood stove replacements. Across Canada, the implementation of the Building Step Code for new buildings is preventing wood stoves as primary heating units, so our focus should be to support existing homes where homeowners want to do the switch. Education is a second important part of it. Having people understand the impacts of wood smoke on vulnerable individuals I believe has helped many change their minds on wood heat as a primary source of heating .
Ariel Becherer (C)	Didn't reply	