

TITLE:

Exploring Respiratory Disease in Guatemala: My Experiences with the Safe Stove Project at Pop Wuj

In Guatemala, respiratory infections are currently both the leading cause of death and the leading cause of mortality. Among other factors, like environmental pollution, smoke from open fires used for cooking in the homes of Guatemalans plays a large role in the development of these health issues. Women and children, who spend the most amount of time in the home, are particularly susceptible. The increased exposure to smoke can contribute to the development of pneumonia, emphysema, lung cancer, bronchitis, and cardiovascular disease. As a volunteer at the Pop Wuj Medical Clinic in Xela, Guatemala, during the summer of 2023, I observed that many of the patients I encountered suffered from various pulmonary conditions. Multiple programs in Guatemala aim to improve air quality in the home by providing safe stoves to Guatemalan families. I had the opportunity to contribute to the Safe Stove Project at Pop Wuj and partook in several trips to a local Guatemalan family's home outside of the city. Over the course of numerous weeks, our group of volunteers constructed a new, more efficient stove for the family. The new stoves not only reduce wood consumption but also vent the smoke from the fire out of the house. Overall, projects like Pop Wuj's Safe Stove Project work to enhance living conditions for rural Guatemalan families to improve their long-term health and quality of life. Since air pollution from cooking fires is a global issue, specifically in developing countries, safe stove projects have the potential to reduce the adverse effects of smoke inhalation experienced by many individuals.