

**HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY****Submission cover sheet**

Post your submission with this cover sheet to:

Submissions Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry  
PO Box 3460  
GIPPSLAND MC Vic 3841Email your submission with this cover sheet to [info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au).

Title: Mrs	First Name: Debra	Surname: Webb
Organisation represented (if applicable):		
Email address:	[REDACTED]	
Postal address:	[REDACTED] Morwell VIC 3840	
Telephone: [REDACTED]	Mobile [REDACTED]	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Origin and circumstances of fire <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Measures by Hazelwood Coal Mine to prevent fire <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Application and administration of regulatory regimes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALL	Response to fire by: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hazelwood Coal Mine <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emergency Services <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Environmental Agencies <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Health Officials <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Government Agencies <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALL	

**Confidentiality**

The Inquiry will consider all requests for confidentiality. Should you wish for your submission or parts of your submission, to be treated as confidential, please clearly state the reason in the space provided below. If you require more room, please attach a separate page and provide together with your submission.

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I acknowledge that my submission will be treated as a public document and may be published, quoted or summarised by the Inquiry.

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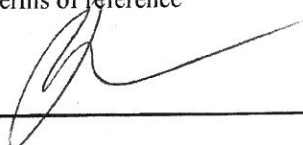
Name of Company and Company details, my personal information and details.  
I do not want media phone calls.

## Acknowledgements

### I understand that:

- I can be contacted by the Inquiry in relation to my submission.
- Anonymous submission will not be accepted.
- The name or town or suburb of each submitter will be identified as apart of every published submission. Other contact details will be removed before publishing.
- The Inquiry will not publish submission, if it believes that the submission material is or could be defamatory, offensive, contravenes, anti-discrimination or anti-vilification legislation or is outside the scope of the Inquiry's terms of reference

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_



OR if sending electronically please confirm your acknowledgment by ticking by box

Date 12/05/14

**PLEASE NOTE: SUBMISSIONS CLOSE ON MONDAY, 12 MAY 2014**

[REDACTED]

Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry  
Email: hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au  
Phone: 1300 442 972  
Recovery Call Centre: 1800 017 777

10/04/2014

To whom it may concern.

I am a 51 year old Female Office Manager of a small Industrial Electrical Company, (currently with 37 Employees),

I work in an office in Electra Avenue, an old SEC building approximately 80 metres adjacent to the coal fire, I also live in Morwell.

Within the first week of the fire, I experienced headaches and feeling unwell, this was the first visit to a doctor ([REDACTED] Medical Centre), for help with headaches,

I worked constantly in this office in the smoke, the only contact by anyone about the fire and effects, was an Email from a customer concerned about my headaches. After reading this email, I informed my Company Directors, I would be working from home, but due to a meeting with the heads of Yokogawa Loy Yang and the need for production of invoices, ferrules and cable markers for cable and electrical Panels, I received phone calls asking me to come back into work.

Before going back into the office, I called the EPA to ask if I was safe to be in this smoke, yes or no, and was transferred to a Manager that said:

"We can't tell you that."

"Well who can?" I could not get a direct answer,

"Do you know what is in the smoke?"

"Yes."

"So, you can tell me?" The reply was very quickly followed with

"We are waiting on further tests."

"You could try talking to Work Cover!"

So after phone calls to go back into work, I would go back to the office, do what I had to and leave. One day after running around to my car passenger door to get me lap-top, I breathed in a full mouth full of the ash, I ran into the office, past a Director coughing, ran into the kitchen and drank a glass of water, in hind sight, I should have rinsed my mouth and spat the water out, not drank it. The Headaches got severe.

A couple days later, I was asked to come in to make Ferrules for Yallourn.

While making them, I found I couldn't remember what to click on, on the computer to make the Cable Markers, something I could normally talk anyone through, at the same time, the Director could not insert the yellow cable marker, ten attempts and he couldn't slide a small piece of plastic into a printer.

I said then "We have to get out of here", and I left immediately, I drove home.

Inside my nose, mouth, throat, chest, felt burnt. The headache and nausea constant. I kept swallowing, it felt like something running down my throat. This was the first time I noticed a rash and blisters on my chest.

That night, every two hours I seemed to become sicker and sicker, I felt too ill to go the hospital to sit in a waiting room for three hours, (the last time I went to our local hospital, this was the experience), I didn't want to be moved, I felt so ill, my husband was just about to call an ambulance when I finally went to sleep, he stayed awake all night watching me, afraid to leave my side.

The next day my Husband took me to Inverloch. It was amazing the effect on the tight chest, I swear in the salt air I could feel something coming out of my chest, I could breathe a lot easier, but the headache and nausea remained.

It was after this time in February, that every breathe in Morwell, felt like my throat was on fire. I believe I had reached my bodie's limit to the exposure of some chemical. I found I simply could not stay in Morwell, I had to leave Morwell, to stop the throat burn and headaches, I went to Trafalgar to be away from the smoke.

The Doctor in Trafalgar said she believed I had a chemical headache, a chemical sensitivity to something. When driving back into Morwell, I would feel the burn in my throat before I was even back in the Town. I tried 5 times to come back to Morwell in March, and every time would become too ill to stay. My husband would say, "Honey, you are looking grey, back to Traf."

Every time, after 4 days in Trafalgar, I would feel better. Symptoms would disappear. I have been to a Doctor seven times now, and all I am given is Ventolin and pain killers, no real help or answers. I called the shire number that was left in my letter box and got no answers or help, they just filled out a survey. I went to the ambulance station, hoping for anything, answers, help, nothing, all I was given was a mask that did nothing to stop the burn in my throat or help the headache or nausea.

This is my sixth time back in Morwell, I tried to go back into the office last Sunday, the smell in the office took my breath, my throat instantly felt like it was burning and I had severe headaches for three days after. The rash on my arms and chest the least of my problems.

I am ill and cannot get any real information or help from anyone. Doctors can only treat symptoms as they have no factual information to the exposure of chemicals.

Last Wednesday my Sister in law, who has a medical condition they call 'a 20 Century Allergy condition', (where she was overdosed with insecticides as a child, who passes out to certain fumes such as aviation fuel, varnish, gas), came to visit. I was walking her out to her car, watching as she tried to hold her breath and run to the car as I got a smell of smoke, my throat burnt instantly, chest tight, she had time only to say Deb before she passed out, I caught her head just before she hit the concrete. It took her 15 minutes before she could open her eyes and have control back of her body. There is definitely a chemical in the smoke.

Even today, this morning at 5:00 am I woke to a dream of having an asthma attack and was desperately looking for Ventolin to help me breathe, on waking I found my throat hurting, it always hurts in the same spot I was burnt and I was having an asthma like attack ( I do not have asthma). The effects seem to be getting worse with each trip back.

Morwell South had evacuations and people were found to have dangerous chemical levels, too high to start work in the mine after just driving through the smoke to get to work. At no time did anyone contact us in [REDACTED] in any way to talk about the fire beside us.

My cousin and children just drove through the smoke last week and all became ill.

My Morwell Doctors said to me "At least you are getting out of town, think of me, I have constant headaches and sore throat and have to work in Morwell everyday". It is not only the people living in Morwell that have been affected.

The biggest problem, is no real information or help,

I cannot get the Factual Data of contaminates in the smoke and ash for this whole event. I cannot get any real medical help until I have access to the factual data for this event. Only symptoms can be treated. I need to know what I have a chemical reaction to, what I have to be careful being around.

Between my brother, a Nuclear Physicist and the Immune specialists at the Alfred Hospital, I have a chance to work out what I am reacting to and how to fight this problem. As it is at the moment, I cannot get any real information to work with. There is no one to go to for help with this exposure. I am afraid to go anywhere without asthma pumps at all times and I must be aware that anything could set me off with breathing difficulties, because I do not know what I have a chemical sensitivity to.

Before I got the air filters at home, I was waking three or four times a night dreaming of being unable to breathe, only to wake to find I was have difficulty breathing. I have days of feeling very unwell, it just happens, there appears to be no trigger I know of, my throat is still very sensitive now and then to something in the air at Morwell, but when I am away from Morwell for over four days, all my problems seem to disappear, this has been documented by my Doctor visits, but on returning to Morwell, my rash reappears, my throat is sensitive and I have asthma like symptoms.

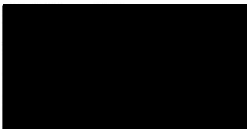
The Inquiry needs to ask only one question of everyone:  
**HOW HAS THE MINE FIRE AFFECTED YOU?**

This one question allows all facts and thoughts to be presented, not have thoughts pigeon holed into minor categories with facts and information totally missed; it should be up the experts to shift data to relevant areas. Do not break up answers to filtered categories, get all the truth and facts first.

I believe the use of large bits of butcher paper to break things into points shows a good example of how to miss information. This type of tool for meetings works well with management with professionals who on the same level of understanding of a problem, but to the public, it feels like a slap in the face, a way to cover up or ignore issues; then to further add limited questions or say the inquiry will be looking at these points, again adding further limits is ridiculous in this situation. There has been one major event that has affected everyone in many ways, please get all the facts first, not limit all aspects of inquiry before you even start!

Yours sincerely,

**Debra Webb**



Morwell Vic 3840

