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16/04/2014 01:10 PM

To Hazelwood Inquiry
info/DPC@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission to Hazelwood coal
mine fire inquiry

Submission:

Dear Board of Inquiry,

I am writing this submission to request that your investigation take account of the following:

I thought my family and I were going to die when the fire began. It caused a lot of panic. I began to tremble and experience sharp chest pains and dizziness. On the first night I was left with no other choice but to stay in the Traralgon Relief Centre, OR stay at home and suffocate on the toxic smoke. I had to sit up for hours and hours in an overcrowded room waiting in suspense as to when it was safe to return home. In the end my family and I decided to stay overnight at the Monash Residence, due to discomfort and an inability to sleep.

The next morning the CFA gave the 'Okay' and said it was 'safe' to return home. The smoke smell had eased when we returned, but our whole, entire house was covered in ash, including our car. The house and our personal belongings were reeking of smoke, and we had to live in it. Much time and money was spent on buying various washing powders and cleaning products to rid the house and our clothes of the ash and stench of smoke. Not to mention having to place our car in a car wash.

In the next few days that dreaded smoke smell crept back stronger than ever.

The CFA gave another warning. This wasn't the end of what was becoming a 'disaster.' Barely able to breath I had to purchase a brand new fan to oscillate the air. The ash had destroyed our house fans. The fan had to be run all day and night to keep the toxic smoke smell out, raising our electricity bills. The lack of fresh air caused me to suffer shortness of breath and hyperventilation which lasted for the whole duration of the Hazelwood fire.

For what started out as a perceived overnight fire threat, turned into months of pain and suffering. Breathless days and nights, light-headedness, lack of sleep, hyperventilation and panic attacks, sore throats, irritated eyes, and a suspicious greying of toe nails.

All in all this disaster drained us emotionally, physically, and

financially.

I

never thought a fire could take almost three entire months to extinguish and

I

only hope and pray to God I have no long term health effects in the future such as lung cancer or any other respiratory health problems.

I'd also like to add the government's mere providing of only 'temporary' accommodation away from the smoke was not enough! Temporary re-housing of all affected Morwell residents for up to 3 months (After the fire was completely extinguished) should have been provided to ensure proper safety from the smoke.

Thank you.

Sincerely Elizabeth Charlesworth

1. Health effects: The health effects of the fire need to be fully understood, and the inquiry should recommend a separate public inquiry into the long-term health effects on the affected population.
2. Fire policy: If the fire prevention policy was adequate, then the fire should not have taken hold. Media reports have suggested that the fire-fighting pipes and sprinklers had been removed, which is alarming if true.
3. Origins of fire: I was shocked to learn that there are small fires in the mine that have been burning for years. The Inquiry should investigate the source of the fire, and the contributing role these "hot-spots" in the mine might have made to the outbreak of the mine fire.
4. Rehabilitation bond: Rehabilitation means the mine site should be left clean and safe. I am concerned that the very small rehabilitation bond for the Hazelwood mine will mean GDF Suez is less likely to properly rehabilitate the site, leaving a burden of possibly hundreds of millions of dollars to Victoria taxpayers.
5. Quality of rehabilitation: Hazelwood's mining licence requires them to do "progressive rehabilitation" of the mine. I am concerned that the coal in an area that should have been rehabilitated as it hadn't been mined for decades was still able to catch on fire. It suggests that existing rehabilitation requirements were inadequate or not enforced.
6. Enforceable timelines: I think the Hazelwood Work Plan should have enforceable timelines for rehabilitation, to ensure disused parts of the mine are rehabilitated and made safe as quickly as possible.
7. Public findings: Given that this inquiry is investigating the causes of a major public health disaster, I feel it is important that the inquiry's

findings be made public very shortly after the completion of your report.

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

Regards,
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