

HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY

Submission cover sheet

Post your submission with this cover sheet to:

c/o

Justice League
 Submissions Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry
 PO Box 3460
 GIPPSLAND MC Vic 3841

Email your submission with this cover sheet to info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au.

Title: <i>MRS</i>	First Name: <i>MARJORIE (MARD)</i>	Surname: <i>PAUL</i>
Organisation represented (if applicable):		
Email address:	—	
Postal address:	[REDACTED]	
Telephone:	[REDACTED]	Mobile:
<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 type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) <i>Effect on school children from kindergarten to those facing final exams</i>	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	

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Acknowledgements

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Signature

M. Paul

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

Date

Justice League

Submission Hazelwood Mine Fire Enquiry
PO Box 3840
Gippsland Mail Centre
Vic. 3841


Morwell
3840
13th April, 2014

Dear Sir,

I only picked up from the Express of the 3rd April that submissions to the Inquiry were invited and that people without access to a website could obtain the required cover note by ringing the number rather inconspicuously placed at the bottom of the page. I rang next day to ask for a copy of the cover sheet and was told it would be placed in the mail on that day. As it still hadn't arrived on the 7th I rang again. Finally two days later it reached me (on 9th April) postmarked 8th April, not giving much time before the first session on the 10th.

I regard myself as being one of the luckier ones in this emergency having relatives in places relatively unaffected who could provide refuge. Even so my life was considerably disrupted as well as the lives of those who have helped me. I don't drive and moved five times in the month following. Only two of these trips could be done by bus. A daughter with a responsible job in Melbourne had to take three days leave as my carer at one stage. Appointments had to be cancelled. People had to drive longer distances to get round the fires. There must have been hardly anyone living in Morwell who wasn't affected by the fires to some extent.

I find it hard to understand how a small grass fire in Driffield could have got into the worked-out mine area. The fire was reported immediately to police on the 9th March, yet it seems nothing was done about it until the following day. The worked out area had not been covered and rehabilitated, the spray system was no longer operable and the mine had been allowed to extend right up to the town. How could this have been allowed to happen? Who was responsible?

Louis Nelson had reported in the Latrobe Valley Express over a year ago that a Senate Enquiry had found that such an emergency could occur and had recommended steps to avoid it but it seems little was done.

Communications weren't good. Three different agencies offered me masks, but what about people who weren't being helped by any agency? I also received a card and a quarto sheet (both offering help with home cleaning, I think) and was offered the use of a HEPA vacuum cleaner by the men's shed, which I appreciated. But again, I was one of the lucky ones.

I live alone in a high-ceilinged house with picture rails and many chinks for dust to lodge where neither my home helper nor I can possibly reach so I am very happy to find I qualify for some assistance. But I grieve for those living already on the bread line, who cannot find work elsewhere, and whose homes are rendered unsaleable even if they could. The only assistance they qualify for, according to the present ruling, is a meager sum which would barely cover removal costs. Is this fair?

There seemed to be a lack of communication. On the 15th March I received a phone call to warn me that residents living west of Macdonald St and north of the Princes Hwy should evacuate, but a local CFA man could tell me no more as he'd only just heard the news himself.

Regarding health advice – to begin with we were assured with certainty that there would be no long term ill effects from breathing in the polluted air, but gradually this advice weakened. There really wasn't a great deal known about the effects, authoritative sources were being consulted etc. Attempts to reassure may actually have led to people not wearing their masks when it would have been better to do so.

I read of two weeks exposure to extreme smog in London after which 12,000 died; also of Smoking Mt bushland reserve where a coal seam fire has been burning for 5,000 -6,000 years deep underground. I think about the victims of thalidomide, pesticides, asbestos, nuclear radiation, nicotine, alcohol and post war stress. Vested interests long and strenuously claimed that these substances would have no long term effects – even after they were proved wrong.

I just hope that the amazing effort of so many volunteers and the way in which community members helped one another may lead to concentrated action NOW to prepare us better for whatever unforeseen emergencies lie ahead.

Mardi Paul



Clearing the air

By Louis Nelson March 7, 2013, midnight

CONCERNS about the health impacts brown coal power station emissions are having on Latrobe Valley residents will be assessed by a senate inquiry, submissions for which close tomorrow.

The national inquiry, which will look at populations most impacted by air quality issues, will assess the standards of current monitoring regulations across a number of industries, and has already attracted a number of submissions addressing the Valley's coal industry.

Victorian Greens senator Richard Di Natale, who will head the inquiry, said it was critical people of the Valley understood exactly what impact combusted particles and coal dust were having on their long term health.

"Particularly now there's a push to continue expanding the mining of (Valley) coal and exports of coal, we need to be very clear about the health risks which are entailed with that," Mr Di Natale said.

The Latrobe Valley Air Monitoring Network, which is funded by the power industry, operates two air monitoring stations in Rosedale South and Jeeralang Hill, while the Environment Protection Agency operates a Traralgon station, all which monitor sulphur dioxide, particle matter, and ozone.

The EPA concluded a 12-month program last month, which monitored particle matter down to the size of 2.5 microns at a Morwell East site, the data for which has yet to be validated.

However Mr Di Natale said there were widespread concerns current monitoring levels were inadequate to register particles less than 2.5 microns, which are widely blamed to cause long term respiratory problems.

"It's that really small stuff that gets very deep into people's lungs, and there are a range of studies which show these particles can cause a range of respiratory issues, including cancer, so it is vital we get an adequate gauge on our exposure to coal dust," he said.

Traralgon resident Dan Caffrey, who has made a submission on behalf of Latrobe Valley Sustainability Group, said he had ongoing concerns about "brown plumes" of smoke coming from the ageing Morwell Energybrix and Hazelwood power stations.

"Traralgon is north east of both Hazelwood and Energybrix, and the prevailing winds are mostly south westerly, so we are right in the path of that browny smoke," Mr Caffrey said.

"As soon as we moved to the Valley (from Tasmania), within a few months my seven year-old son, who is into athletics in big way, developed asthma.

"I have spoken to people who have moved into Valley in the last five or so years who have never experienced asthma, who are now showing breathing difficulty symptoms."

The inquiry is due to visit targeted regions across the country in April, and while an itinerary is not yet set, Mr Di Natale said he was hopeful it would be visiting the Valley.

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