



Fw: Morwell Mine Fire Submission

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Submission

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10/05/2014 07:37 PM

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Subject Morwell Mine Fire Submission

Title: MS

First Name: Carlyne

Surname: Boothman

Email address: [REDACTED]

Home or office phone: [REDACTED]

Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Measures taken by Hazelwood Coal Mine to prevent fire, Application and administration of regulatory regimes, Response to fire by Hazelwood Coal Mine, Response to fire by Emergency Services, Response to fire by Public Health Officials, Response to fire by Other Government Agencies

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SUBMISSION-TO-THE-HAZELWOOD-MINE-FIRE-INQUIRY.docx

SUBMISSION TO THE HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY FROM
CAROLYNE BOOTHMAN

[REDACTED] MORWELL
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

1. Sunday 9th February – The Hearnese Oak Fire had been active for several days by this stage. I received the Fire Ready Emergency Warning at about 2pm and headed home to my parents place (where I was living at the time) at [REDACTED] Morwell. Fires were clearly visible from Maryvale Rd Morwell, and I continued listening to the ABC Radio and following the incident on the Internet. Despite all the warnings, I found it fascinating but disturbing that so many people of my parents' generation continued to go about their day as though nothing was happening!!! I wondered how much more than an "EMERGENCY" warning did people need in town before they began to pack and be ready to move!! My own parents made no effort to prepare medication, clothing etc. and think about where and how they would get out. Whilst this trusting faith in the emergency services is lovely, it is a real worry in town with an aging population like this. We live two blocks from a large bush reserve, yet this didn't seem to worry my parents or the people in our street! It certainly worried me!! The reality would be that if that bush was on fire we would struggle to get out. People in towns really need to be more proactive about their fire safety and hopefully they've all learned their lessons. Throughout the evening I monitored the progress and realised we would be okay once people were told to be above Maryvale Rd. It was a fairly sleepless night, and I drove down Maryvale Rd and could see the fires still burning as I left for work in Sale at 7.20am.
2. Monday 10th February – the town was covered in smoke when I arrived home from Sale at about 6pm. I remained indoors overnight. There were no warnings about air quality at this stage.
3. Tuesday 11th February – I left for Sale at 7am, and then headed to Licola for a four day camp with our year seven students. I was anticipating clean mountain air at Licola, and was horrified to find visibility was very poor even in the mountains and the smoke had settled around the camp valley. There were warnings about keeping people with asthma etc. inside which is fairly impossible to do on an outdoor camp, but we closely monitored the students and the air quality. The smoke remained a problem all week, with visibility also being low all week.
4. Friday 14th February – I returned home to Morwell by 3pm, and the smell became stronger the closer I got. At this stage there were still no warnings about the air quality, and I struggled as I paid my bond at the Real Estate Agent's in [REDACTED] Morwell, and collected the keys for a unit I was renting on [REDACTED] Morwell.

5. Throughout February I continued to teach in Sale, which gave me the advantage of being out of the worst of the smoky air during the day. Returning home I would lock myself indoors, and did use the split system air conditioning due to the hot weather. The weekends were particularly awful, especially the 22/23 February, where visibility in Commercial Rd Morwell was extremely poor, the smell made my throat burn and my eyes sting. We were sent confusing messages about staying indoors, but by the time these were sent I was already out and about doing my shopping and chores.
6. I was fairly active in the media e.g. ABC talkback radio, in calling for more action to be taken and more information to be given to the public, as the messaging coming out from government agencies was confusing, overwhelming and difficult to understand.
7. On Tuesday 25th February I was driving from Sale to Churchill for a Latrobe Community Health Service Board Meeting, when the ABC Radio announcement came that the fire had escaped the open cut. This was clearly visible as I drove to Churchill, with black smoke pouring out from behind the Hazelwood Power Station.
After this fire, I spoke with a musician friend of mine who works at Hazelwood Power Station and is also a CFA Volunteer. I have asked him to submit this story himself, as he tells about the mass confusion and lack of direction at the face of the fire. He told me that he had his Ute with his CFA gear as he was leaving the station, but he saw the fire approaching the coal bunkers and station, so he quickly changed into his CFA gear. He told me there were several MFB trucks and crews lined up along the fence line, but none of them had used bolt cutters to open the gates and get into where the fire was, and to protect the conveyor belts and the coal store at the base of the station. This friend of mine began yelling at the MFB crews to get moving and open the gates, start protecting the conveyors and the station etc. He received many rude comments and sneers for this, but he persisted. He was horrified at the lack of understanding apparent from the MFB crews, that if the fire got in the coal stores they would lose the power station. Their lack of knowledge was particularly evident when they parked their truck on what looked like grass, but was actually a bed of coal, and this friend had to order them off there for their own safety!
He also spoke with anger and embarrassment about the way the local CFA volunteers were treated when coming in for meals at the Staging area. He had already worked during the day at the station, was then allocated to a strike crew in the cut, and when the crew came up from the cut for a meal, they were very dirty. They were made to strip to their underwear outside the meals area, and had to parade in past the MFB crews before they were given overalls. The MFB crews of course teased and jeered them. This friend was also disgusted to hear members from the MFB loudly stating in the dining hall on another day, that they didn't care how long the fire went as they were getting paid travel, accommodation and shift penalties. This friend of mine is not known to complain about situations, he is a happy, friendly man, and for him to report these stories they are serious.

8. I was invited by the CFA to join the Community Advisory Group, which I welcomed and committed to. This Committee worked well with many agencies to try and get support actions and strategies in place, but were completely hamstrung by the inter-departmental bureaucracy. For example, a simple message couldn't be placed on the internet until it had been drafted, edited, submitted up the hierarchy to the minister of whichever department it was could approved it, taking at least 24 hours. In this day and age this is ridiculous! The many times when messaging was confused, or decisions couldn't be made promptly enough, was incredible, and led me to believe that there were too many organisations involved in this, and it would have been easier and more efficient to bring in an armed forces general who could just direct that actions that needed to be taken and make it all happen quickly and efficiently.
9. On Friday 28th February I received a phone call from Red Cross, asking me to be a volunteer at Commercial Road Primary School to help take the names and contact details of people who would be leaving, as the relocation packages had been announced. I am not a Red Cross volunteer and have not done any training with them, but I headed along, happy to help out. They were anticipating a huge influx of people collecting their relocation grants, but this was not the case. The Red Cross brought three car loads of volunteers to Morwell that evening, only for them to be turned around as they were not needed. I was then rostered on to work over the weekend, but they finally realised I had not trained with them, and so I wasn't required.
10. I went to the Morwell Bowling Club that evening to talk to people who were eligible to relocate, and when asked why they were still here, the answer was, "Where will I go? How would I get there?" The whole idea was laughable, as the people trying to be relocated are mostly over 50 and 60 years of age, have limited mobility or mobility issues, and can't just go to any place – it needs to be easy for these people to access, like having disabled showers and toilets. These people would physically struggle to sleep on a stretcher in the local town hall, and so they stayed where they were.
11. To further our frustrations, when the clean-up package was announced, it was a ridiculous package and of no use to people like myself who live in Morwell but didn't access any of the funding etc. as per the requirements. This became an embarrassment to the Committee, and furthermore, made the agencies involved look incompetent and uncaring.
12. Our Committee fought long and hard to get the message across that the community wanted a long term health study, and no amount of novel funding allocations would earn the government agencies credibility if this was not conducted. We are VERY pleased to hear that our health will be monitored ongoing, as this is the major concern from all members of the community.
13. My father worked at the SEC for many years as a crane driver in the Morwell Open Cut. He had purpose designed and built fire fighting equipment built onto the crane,

and was involved in many of the fires that occurred in and near the Cut. He retired when the SEC was sold. He received a phone call during one of the more recent fires, I'm guessing 1997, from a worker in the cut, asking him to come back in and reassemble the fire fighting gear, as it had been taken off the crane and they now needed it! My dad laughed and declined the offer. He was well aware of the changes that had been made in the Cut and the lack of fire fighting equipment available to the workers in the cut. There have often been fires in the Open Cut – in my lifetime I can recall at least 4, but course they were fought quickly, with the necessary equipment in place, and never got out of hand like this current fire did.

14. I drove up to the viewing area of the Hazelwood Mine on Black Saturday to check on the cut, and there were sprinklers operating on that day. I wonder why they were not in place/operating the days and weeks prior to this event?
15. I have attended several sessions of the Inquiry and the Health Inquiry, and must commend the staff at these, and the caring and professional manner they are operating.
16. I must also commend the CFA, not only those in the “front line”, but also those in the Incident Control Centre, who willingly took on my advice and suggestions about how best to work with this unique community, including the schools, and always found I was listened to and my advice was welcomed and acted upon.

Carolyne Boothman (B.Ed).

10.5.14