

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 3841

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

Title: Mrs	First Name: Julie	Surname: Brown
Organisation represented (if applicable):		
Email address:	[Redacted]	
Postal address:	[Redacted], Morwell 3840	
Telephone: [Redacted]	Mobile: [Redacted]	
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 Other (please state)	Response to fire by: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hazelwood Coal Mine 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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Signature

Jule Brown

12/05/2014

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

Date

To the Board of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry,

My name is Julie Brown and I am a resident of Morwell. My husband's name is Mathew (34) and I have two six year old son's and a two year old daughter. I am writing this submission to tell my story, and to share my disappointment in the lack of support offered to people of the Latrobe Valley throughout and since this disaster.

On the 7th February there was a fire that had broken out in Hernes Oak, which had my husband and I questioning our weekend trip that we had planned to go to Lakes Entrance. Because this fire had been brought under control we decided to go along with our plans.

On 9th February I received a notification from the Fire Ready App on my phone that this fire had spread and there were more fires in the area so my family and I prepared to leave Lakes Entrance to return home. We were met with a road block on the Princes Hwy near the Latrobe Regional Hospital but we were let through because we live in Morwell. Getting further into town the smoke became thicker and visibility was reduced severely. As we returned home we spoke with our neighbours that informed us that we had been advised to leave but we decided to stay as there are blocks of houses around us in all directions so we didn't feel that it was a direct threat to us at that time.

As the days passed my husband and children's asthma worsened, we all had headaches, fatigue, irritated eyes, sore throats and were coughing terribly. My husband had an ear and sinus infection that antibiotics and eardrops were not helping. The only advise given to us was to stay indoors and keep the windows and doors closed – this didn't help, the smoke still got in and we all suffered because of that. We couldn't use our air conditioner and couldn't go outside or get any fresh air in Summer, it was cruel and unnecessary. We should not have been there.

We tried to get out of town for respite when we could, but being a single income family this was not easy to manage. We had an opportunity to go camping at Bear Gully on the 22nd February, but unfortunately too much damage had already been done. One of my sons was now vomiting, had diarrhea and was not feeling well. It amazed me how much easier my husband and children were breathing within hours of being away from the Latrobe Valley.

We returned to Morwell the next afternoon, 23rd February and within 30 minutes of getting into town my husband and children were wheezing and I had a headache. The next day, 24th February my daughter and myself went on the school excursion with my sons school, Morwell Park Primary School to Inverloch.

On February 25th I attended the Community Information Session held at Morwell Neighbourhood House. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] When asked about what the particles in the smoke were made of the EPA representative said that samples would need to be tested, implying that they hadn't already been. Cr Graeme Middlemiss was present at the Information Session and he said to the EPA representative that the testing had been done because he received the results the night before and asked her if that was correct. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Cr Graeme Middlemiss then went on to explain that he had a discussion with John Merritt about the PM2.5 readings not being shown on the EPA website and that John Merritt had assured him that it would be from then on.



Above: Photo taken at the Community Information Session that I attended on 25th February at Morwell Neighbourhood House. Top left of the picture: I am pictured standing against the brick wall. Pictured top centre: Cr. Graeme Middlemiss is pictured standing wearing a black jacket and jeans.

I lost all respect and trust for the EPA that day, and as soon as I left the Morwell Neighbourhood house I started planning where we would go and stay. As we couldn't afford to pay accommodation and my husband couldn't afford to leave work we had no other option but to live in a tent. So I left that afternoon with my children to go and stay at a free camping ground on Morwell River Road in Boolarra.

Camping with no power, and no shower with no car or phone reception in case of an emergency wasn't going to last us very long, and on Wednesday 5th March we had no other option but to return to Morwell. Once again, within about 30 minutes of returning everyone was coughing, my children and husband were wheezing and we all had a headache. My husband had work the next day, Thursday 6th March but I stayed indoors with my children in the hope that their asthma wouldn't worsen. Unfortunately one of my sons asthma got to a point that I have never seen it get to

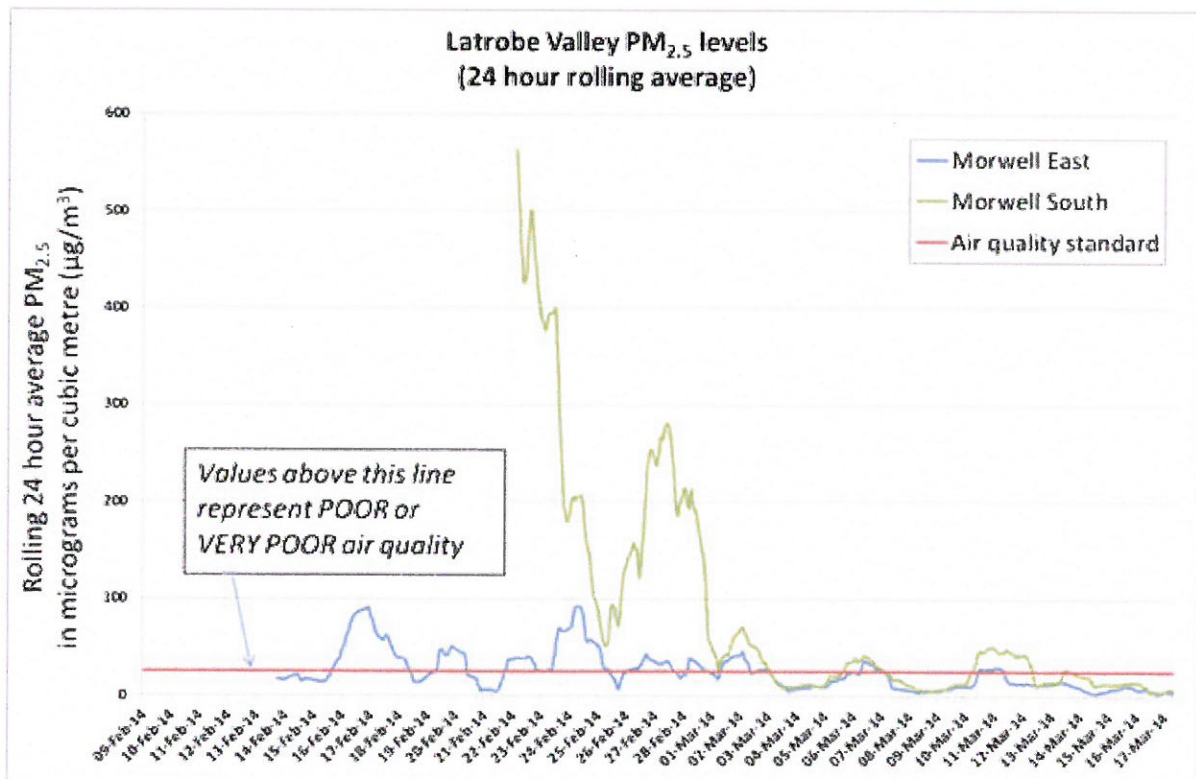
before, pre-mine fire my children only ever needed to use their Ventolin when they were sick. He was crying because he couldn't breathe properly and luckily I had a friend that was able to bring her partners asthma medication over so that I could see if that helped. I had heard from other residents that waiting times at the hospital were long and I didn't want to take my kids outside and sit in a waiting room for hours with the three of them if I could help it. The extra medication helped enough that my son could get to sleep, so I continued packing our bags to leave the next morning. He was then up during the night requiring more medication and vomiting. When he woke at 6:00am being sick again, I got everyone else up and we left to stay at my elderly grandmothers house in Cranbourne on Friday 7th March.

My children and I were able to stay there, even though my sons were missing school and all three of them were missing out on their swimming lessons but my husband had to return to Morwell to work and then came back to Cranbourne on the weekend.

We all returned on Sunday 16th March when the air quality had improved because I didn't like my son's missing out on so much school. Things weren't as bad as they had been but the smell was still there and were all still suffering from headaches, lethargy, fatigue and sore throats.

In my opinion these health impacts should have been more than enough for the Health Department to declare this disaster a state of emergency and evacuate the town of Morwell. That is without considering the possibility of Long Term Health effects. I now have no trust in any government agency or department and I am disgusted at the lack of support that they have all shown our community.

The air quality monitoring, while it should have been set up sooner and be reading all relevant pollutants, clearly shows that PM_{2.5} readings were well above standard!



The World Health Organisation shows a table which has information about how SHORT TERM exposure (1 day) can affect a persons health.

Table 2

WHO air quality guidelines and interim targets for particulate matter: 24-hour concentrations*

	PM ₁₀ (µg/m ³)	PM _{2.5} (µg/m ³)	Basis for the selected level
Interim target-1 (IT-1)	150	75	Based on published risk coefficients from multi-centre studies and meta-analyses (about 5% increase of short-term mortality over the AQG value).
Interim target-2 (IT-2)	100	50	Based on published risk coefficients from multi-centre studies and meta-analyses (about 2.5% increase of short-term mortality over the AQG value).
Interim target-3 (IT-3)*	75	37.5	Based on published risk coefficients from multi-centre studies and meta-analyses (about 1.2% increase in short-term mortality over the AQG value).
Air quality guideline (AQG)	50	25	Based on relationship between 24-hour and annual PM levels.

The highest this table shows is an exposure of 75ug/m3 over 24 hours. The air quality in Morwell South was well over 100 for more than just 24 hours and it reached over 500 – 20 times the standard!

I am just a stay at home mum, and I was able to find all of this information in less than an hour on google. The Health Department had to have known about the risks they were putting us in, something needs to be done about their lack of action in protecting the Latrobe Valley and about the fact that they lied to us about the dangers that we were in!

My friend spoke with a Chemist who contacted her. He works at Yallourn still and used to do monitoring for the EPA in Morwell. My friend was asking him about the PM2.5 particles, if they are so high and the VOC analysis shows everything to be well below acceptable levels - how can that be? He replied 'Not everything has been tested for, there are lots of other elements that are not included' She said "Oh so the ones that have been tested for are not the harmful ones?" and he said "Yes, they didn't test for the ones that are harmful"

I also feel like GDF Suez are not being honest with what is going on in the mine. I called the mine during the week of 28th April – 2nd May and after a few days of being redirected, leaving messaging and having to call head office I was told that the person I was speaking to was not allowed to release any information. I was then told that there was a media release that had been drafted but they were awaiting their PR department to approve, a media release was finally published on their website that says that they are monitoring hotspots. During the phone conversation that I had with someone at the Hazelwood mine, I was told that there was a team of about twelve workers that are still digging out the 'hot spots' to try to get them extinguished

yet the media release says that workers are ‘monitoring’ the hotspots. I asked this person how big the ‘hotspots’ were, and she responded by saying that she didn’t know exactly how big they were but they are quite small “..it’s not like it is half the mine or anything” were her exact words. Less than half of a huge mine doesn’t mean small. I also have photo’s that I took on 26th April that clearly show several sprinklers still being used in the mine, I’d really like some honest answers about what is really going on and how much of the coal is still smouldering.

Link to GDF Suez media release:

<http://www.gdfsuezau.com/media/UploadedDocuments/nr%20-%20hot%20spots%202.5.pdf>



Above: Photo taken by myself of the mine from the Powerworks carpark on 26th April 2014.



Above: Photo taken by myself of the mine from the Powerworks carpark on 26th April 2014.

This can't happen again, GDF Suez need to learn that fire prevention **MUST** be kept to the highest standard, unused parts of the mine should be rehabilitated and government agencies need to learn that supporting and protecting the people of this country is more important than maintaining profits!

We are still suffering. Everyone in my family is anxious, I am depressed and we have all been more aggressive than usual. Something needs to be done to look after the physical, mental and emotional health of the residents of the Latrobe Valley.

Everyone should be tested for heavy metals and Carbon Monoxide, and this should not be at the expense of the victims!

Sincerely,

Julie Brown

P.S. I would also just like to point out that the health act clearly states that "If a public health risk poses a serious threat, lack of full scientific certainty should not be

used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent or control the public health risk” so I feel that the Department of Health has breached the Public Health and Wellbeing Act: Precautionary principle because they did not have scientific certainty that this health risk did not pose a serious threat and allowed the people of Morwell to be exposed to an obvious risk. They have failed all of us, it is disgraceful!



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PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING ACT 2008 - SECT 6

Precautionary principle

If a public health risk poses a serious threat, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent or control the public health risk.

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12/5/2014.

I have just finished at the doctor with my son who is once again vomiting and lethargic.

I requested that he be tested for heavy metals in his system. The doctor asked me why and I said because of his exposure to the mine fire smoke. She asked me if I knew what metals were present in the smoke so that she knew what to put on the pathology request.

Health Professionals in the area should have been informed about what residents have been exposed to. Why were they not informed?

How can they know what to check for when patients present with symptoms?

NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!

Julie Brown