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Subject Morwell Mine Fire Submission

1 attachment



Southern-Cross-Care-Morwell-Mine-Fire-Impact-Statement-3.docx

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Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Other (please state)

If Other please state here: Organisational Impact statement

Please select one of the following options: 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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## **Southern Cross Care Morwell Mine Fire Impact Statement**

Southern Cross Care Victoria (SCCV) is a leading not-for-profit organisation providing both residential and community aged care services across metropolitan and regional Victoria, providing services to over 5300 older Victorians and employing 1300 staff.

Our Gippsland office has been based in Morwell since 2001 and currently provides over 28,000 hours of home based services every year to more than 350 frail and elderly clients across Gippsland. It employs a local staff of over 45 health professionals.

On Sunday February 9 2014, a bushfire in the south western edges of Morwell spread into the Hazelwood Power Station Open Cut Coal Mine.

As an aged care agency we do not provide an emergency or evacuation service, but we are required to ensure our clients have contingency plans in place should emergencies arise. Our response in all emergencies then is to check with clients to see if they can and/or should enact their contingency plans, and have systems and support in place to evacuate if they need to.

On this occasion some clients evacuated and some stayed, and all were deemed to be as safe as possible with access to assistance if they needed it, usually from family, friends and neighbours. A critical issue for some clients was that as a result of their complex care needs, it was difficult to identify an alternate location (although we were eventually able to) to ensure their safety and care needs were supported.

Our office in Morwell is also located near the affected area and we had concerns about the health and welfare of our office based staff as well as our staff working in the community (in clients homes), often in the smoke affected areas.

When the Department of Health gave advice to 'at risk' people to relocate, we assisted clients who had not left previously, out of the area, although some chose to stay at home. We remained in daily contact with all of our clients remaining in the affected areas.

It was at this point in time that a decision was made to relocate our office out of the affected area. This proved to be quite difficult as many of our network and peer agencies were also relocating, or had no room themselves in other areas because they were accommodating their own staff from around the Morwell area.

We eventually relocated our 12 office staff to The Monash University School of Rural and Indigenous Health at the old Moe Hospital – they were kind enough to let us use their conference room for the duration. It was not ideal. We were all cramped into a small area but we had IT connectivity, phones and were able to conduct most of our daily business.

In addition, during this time we had to find alternative accommodation for 2 days of staff training sessions which we could not reschedule due to staff rostering arrangements, and a further training day was cancelled because the presenters from Melbourne were reluctant to come to the area.

On a daily return to the office to collect mail and ensure property integrity, it was discovered that over the weekend a rainstorm had caused considerable water damage to our communications room and equipment, office fixtures including carpets and furniture, and storage items. Coal dust and fly ash had caused the downpipes to overflow causing damage to approximately \$20,000 worth of ICT equipment. This also resulted in a further 2 weeks delay in returning to our office. In all we were relocated for 4 weeks.

Considerable further costs were incurred to clean-up the office including:

- Hiring plumbers to clean out guttering and spouting
- Repairs to the damage and improvements deemed necessary
- Ongoing preventative maintenance that will be required
- Specialist cleaning (from Melbourne) of air-conditioning vents, filters and ducts
- Changing of drinking water filter for staff office use
- Specialist cleaning (from Melbourne) of office – walls, windows, all surfaces inside and out, phones, desks, PCs, upholstery including all chairs, industrial drying of carpets, carpet and floor surfaces cleaning, ionising air filtering, air quality testing pre and post clean-up
- Relocation rental
- Relocation of office costs
- Extensive damage to ICT and infrastructure

The impact of the fire on SCCV clients and staff:

- The minimal information provided made decision making difficult. SCCV always considers client and staff safety, and the lack of detailed information provided made this goal difficult
- Loss of income relating to clients relocating out of the area (therefore not needing services we would normally provide)
- The difficulty in identifying the right alternate options for so many older people in such a short time
- Loss of income for the staff who would have provided those services
- Great inconvenience to the staff and their families and to the clients and their families
- Physical upheavals and disruption to services - relocating offices and return to SCC Gippsland offices
- Staff had to work in difficult cramped conditions with little privacy, difficulties in phone and communications, and lack of IT infrastructure such as limited printing/scanning/copying
- Staff had to deal with worry about the unknown effects on their health, especially for those who live within close proximity to the mines, and no real assurance there will not be any long term ill health effects, or if this could happen again
- Frustration over a prolonged period of time with little or no news of when or how the situation was going to be resolved. Uncertainty about whether to relocate or not.
- The cleaning efforts required
- The consequent blocked gutter which resulted in damage to property especially the IT server and subsequent down time involved

- The emotional cost to everyone involved-actual and potential
- The increased resources expended in all of the above
- The initial financial costs incurred.

