

Hazelwood Inquiry info/DPC@DTF

09/04/2014 11:09 AM

To Hazelwood Inquiry  
info/DPC@DTF

cc

bcc

Subject Morwell Mine Fire Submission

1 attachment



VOST-Victoria-Hazelwood-Mine-Fire-Inquiry-submission-6-4-14.pdf

Title: Mr

First Name: Bradley

Surname: Lemon

Organisation represented (if applicable): VOST Victoria

Email address: [REDACTED]

Home or office phone: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Origin and circumstances of fire, Measures taken by Hazelwood Coal Mine to prevent fire, Response to fire by Emergency Services, Other (please state)

If Other please state here: VOST Victoria job notes, records of Twitter traffic.

Please select one of the following options: I request that my submission or parts of my submission, be treated as confidential, and not published quoted or summarised by the Inquiry, for reasons stated below

Confidential Reason: Can you please protect the privacy of our volunteers by omitting personal details (dates of birth and addresses) in any public release of our report? Thank you.

Upload Submission:

<http://hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/formidable/VOST-Victoria-Hazelwood-Mine-Fire-Inquiry-submission-6-4-14.pdf>

User Information

[REDACTED]  
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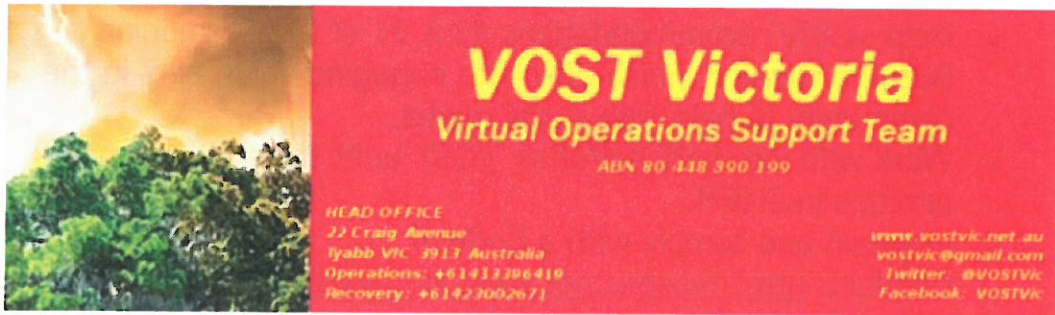
AppleWebKit/537.36 (KHTML, like Gecko) Chrome/33.0.1750.154

Safari/537.36

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6th April, 2014.

Your Worship,

VOST Victoria is a social enterprise registered at Tyabb, Victoria, with six registered members at various locations in Victoria. We practice Social Media for Emergency Management (SMEM). VOST Victoria does not make an income, and all services are provided by volunteers.

VOST Victoria helps the community by providing timely, accurate information about emergencies, and feedback to the Victorian State Control Centre.

At its core, VOST (Virtual Operations Support Team) seeks simply to use SMEM (social media for emergency management) to harness actionable information with predictable outcomes during all phases of disaster.

**Duties that SMEM operators perform:**

- Work with official agencies to broadcast their messages.
- Post to Twitter about emergencies (going since '09 in Vic)
- Collate info from social media and other sources - job notes
- Provide advice to official agencies about social media - e.g. Department of Premier & Cabinet, and Country Fire Authority, re: hashtags.
- Provide information to the community where appropriate.
- Actively search for tweets and Facebook pages which deal in information about emergencies, (e.g. Gippsland Community Emergency Support)
- Help provide community-driven resourcing (e.g. offers register)

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- Help satisfy recommendations 43 & 71 of the Tasmanian Bushfire Inquiry, which deal with engaging volunteers in the community to help with social media.
- Work with international/other VOST units to establish best practice in SMEM.
- Maintain and comply with a Code of Conduct: <http://vostvic.net.au/smem-code-of-conduct-for-victoria>

### Examples of other VOSTs:

- Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOSTs) are hosted in many countries. They are assisted by a parent body, VOSG, from New York, USA.
- VOST units are registered with VOSG ( <http://vosg.us/> ) in:
  - New York, USA
  - Victoria, Australia
  - New Zealand
  - Oklahoma, USA
  - Washington, USA
  - Canada
  - France
  - Spain
  - Hawaii
  - United Kingdom
  - Other places, particularly in the United States.

VOST Victoria participates in the international VOST Leadership Coalition: <http://vosg.us/vost-leadership-coalition/>

### About this document:

This document was prepared for the 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry by Bradley John Lemon Ph: [REDACTED]

Registered VOST Victoria volunteers mentioned in this document:

- Bradley John Lemon [REDACTED]  
Tyabb, 3913.  
Twitter: [REDACTED] Operations  
Manager/Partner. Former CFA volunteer.



- [REDACTED] Animal Welfare Manager/Partner.
- [REDACTED] Recovery Manager. Current CFA volunteer.
- [REDACTED] SMEM Volunteer.
- [REDACTED] SMEM Volunteer. Current CFA volunteer.

**Description of events:**

On the 7th of February, 2014, myself, and other members of VOST Victoria observed a fire that began in the area of McDonald's Track, Hernes Oak, and the incident control point was called McDonald's Track Control on CFA radio and elsewhere. This fire jumped the Princes Highway and the railway line but was eventually brought under control.

On the 9th of February, at approximately 1:21pm, the following CFA radio traffic was logged by Bradley John Lemon:

*13:21 Morwell Pumper 2: Vicfire, Morwell Pumper 2, message.*

*Vicfire: Morwell Pumper 2, send.*

*Morwell Pumper 2: Morwell Pumper 2, we're just notifying residents in the Toners Lane area, that fire from Hernes Oak heading straight this way, so we're notifying residents.*

*Vicfire: Which fire is heading that way, Morwell Pumper 2?*

*Morwell Pumper 2: Yeah, the Hernes Oak fire's jumped the containment lines and is heading straight for, ah, Morwell, and the Toners Lane area - I don't know if they want to get some emergency alerts happening.*

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*Vicfire:* Roger, Morwell Pumper 2, can you go to command channel 191, ah, that's the Hernes Oak command channel, um, and advise them, and see if they can organise a warning?

*Morwell Pumper 2:* Roger, will do.

*Vicfire:* If you have any problems reaching anyone on 191, get back to me until you make sure that message goes to whoever [it] needs to.

*Morwell Pumper 2:* Roger, wilco, thank you.

This traffic is significant to SMEM operators because it indicates that a wildfire is impacting on the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI). Any fire that impacts on a WUI anywhere in the state is of concern to VOST Victoria SMEM operators due to the threat to life and property. Such events usually cause a lot of Twitter traffic.

- The 9th of February was a very busy day for fires in Victoria, and VOST Victoria recorded job notes for fires at Mickleham/Kilmore ( <http://vostvic.net.au/9-2-14-mickleham-fire-social-media-intel> ) and Gladysdale ( <http://bit.ly/1g8kJcO> ), both curated by George Anthony Hall. We did not start a job note for the Hazelwood mine-fire until the 11th of February, curated by Bradley John Lemon. Our job notes are shared with the Victorian State Control Centre (SCC) via 3 email accounts, and with two people involved with TV media.
- Printed versions of VOST Victoria job notes for the Hazelwood mine-fire, detailing key Twitter traffic, can be provided to you. However, I recommend that you view a digital version of the job note, as you are able to click on the images of tweets to access important links mentioned in any tweet. You can find Page 1, and the index, here: <http://bit.ly/1oAmSm7> Please note that these are large pages with hundreds of individual images which will be slow to load, and are not recommended for portable equipment. When I created this record, I believed it would be important to anyone investigating the mine-fire after the event. It does suffer from curator bias, as I was able

to choose which tweets I included in the record. My goal was to remain balanced, and not take any side or push any agenda. However, I stopped capturing the tweets from the #quitcoal campaign halfway through because I felt the tweets were not helping the people of the Latrobe Valley, or adding anything of value to the public record in regards to the mine-fire and the smoke and ash in Morwell. Also, it must be remembered that many people in Morwell depend on coal for their income, (it's a coal town), and these people might find this political traffic offensive. It took me up to five hours each day to capture the massive amount of key Twitter traffic about the Hazelwood mine-fire and the situation in Morwell (and the rest of the Latrobe Valley), and I maintained the log for five weeks, until the fire was declared 'safe'. If you are interested, the specific search term I used in Twitter to track this traffic is: "traralgon" OR "Yallourn" OR "morwell" OR "hazelwood" OR "mine fire" OR "#minefire" OR "latrobe valley" OR "morewell" -RT

- It is my policy to never try to direct operations, but on this one occasion, I made an exception. On February 15 at 12:59 pm, CFA issued a Watch and Act message for people in some areas of Morwell, for Carbon Monoxide. I believe that carbon monoxide is particularly dangerous for pregnant women. At 1:20 pm, I tweeted "13:19...I'm gonna go right out on a limb here and suggest that if you are pregnant, you should vacate area north of Princes Hwy at Morwell." Details of that and other traffic from that time period are captured in the job notes, on the first page. I am not aware of anyone else who called for the evacuation of the vulnerable at that point, and to this day I don't know if I did the right thing, but I had been informed that no pregnant person was permitted to work at the Hazelwood mine-fire as a firefighter, and I was terribly concerned for unborn children in parts of Morwell.
- Bradley John Lemon: I tracked the Hernes Oak fire on social media and CFA radio from 7th February 2014. I was able to download an archive all my own tweets from Twitter. I have extracted tweets about the Hernes Oak, Morwell, and Driffield fires from 7th February to 10th February,



2014: <http://bit.ly/1q3NiKH> The official VOST Victoria job notes taken by myself continue from the 11th February 2014.

*"I believe CFA did the best they could, given the severe fire-weather at the time. I had tweeted that the 7th had been the busiest day of the season. This was made insignificant by the day experienced on the 9th of February. I don't think any amount of tankers or helicopters could have held that fire back. The mines are a risk that can be allowed for in planning. You wouldn't leave 44 gallon drums of petrol lying around without their lids on. I don't understand why the vulnerable disused batters were not either capped with clay, or protected by fire suppression systems. The chances of a fire eventually impacting on one of the mines is nearly 100%, given that wildfire runs across Victoria every day during the fire season. Eventually, one was going to impact the mine, whether it was lit deliberately, or as a result of a lightning strike in the bush nearby.*

*I believe authorities underestimated the impact of the hazmat problem in the town of Morwell in the early stages. I was a firefighter for many years, and have stood in lots of smoke. I know it's not pleasant, but it can be tolerated. However, this smoke, and ash, was different to the smoke, embers and ash from a bushfire. At the peak of fire activity in the mine, carbon monoxide became a risk for parts of Morwell, and I was concerned for the vulnerable (pregnant women), and for pets and animals, which I know cannot handle carbon monoxide as well as normal human beings can. For instance, I believe a human can just survive at 15% oxygen in the air. A dog will perish at 16% oxygen in the air, I'm led to believe. I always thought that this was the original reason behind Dalmatian dogs - they were a 'canary in the coal-mine', as well as trained for search and rescue. In any event, I had concerns for the welfare of animals in Morwell, as well as humans. I spent a lot of time helping Rose Lemon try to organise a respite area for people with pets, but was unsuccessful. I tried to organise either Moe Racecourse or Sale Showgrounds. I believe many people won't evacuate, even if they are vulnerable, if they can't guarantee the welfare of their pets. They see their pets as a member of the family, and they are not expendable. If they cannot find a place to take their pets, then they will not leave them. I worked with my MP, Neale Burgess, by SMS text message. The government said to me that it was the role of Latrobe City Council and RSPCA to provide a venue for people with pets. However, council nominated DEPI, as per Rose Lemon's report*



*to you. I observed NSW treat the pet problem in a different way for the Blue Mountains fires earlier in the season. I think it was local councils that had designated refuge areas for pets and animals which were well patronised by the community. Animal welfare orgs were able to direct people to designated places, which could provide toilets and other catering needs. These refuge areas are as much for humans as they are for pets. I don't think Victoria meets the high standard set by NSW during the Blue Mountains fires. I maintain that some people will not evacuate if they can't secure the welfare of their pets." Bradley John Lemon, 7th April, 2014.*

- [REDACTED] has also downloaded an archive of his own tweets from Twitter, and extracted relevant traffic from 7th - 10th February 2014. A note with this compiled traffic can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1hh2PaK>

*"I've been a social media operator since Black Saturday 2009 and currently am a part of VOST Victoria. My experience with social media emergency relay and collation includes the 2010-11 Queensland floods and 2011 Victorian floods, along with other situations nationally and internationally. On 7th of February 2014 was monitoring a number of bushfire situations including the Hernes Oak situation. Although by the 10th my main concern was to produce VOST Victoria job notes of social media intelligence regarding the Mickleham fire, when possible I recorded information on the continuing Hernes Oak/Morwell/Hazelwood situation. My archived stream for the dates 7th to 10th of February include retweets of key data and events as well as the information I directly tweeted. These are submitted for your examination particularly as historical data." - [REDACTED] 8th April 2014.*

- [REDACTED] has also downloaded an archive of his own tweets from Twitter, and extracted relevant traffic from 7th - 10th February 2014. A note with this compiled traffic can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1jiHI6p> [REDACTED] was deployed by CFA during this period and was unable to contribute time to SMEM. [REDACTED] was able to maintain the VOST Victoria info document mentioned later in this document.



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- [REDACTED] experienced technical difficulties whilst trying to download his archive. However, VOST Victoria members were able manually scroll back his Twitter timeline to that period, and extracted relevant traffic from 7th - 10th February 2014. A note with this compiled outgoing traffic can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1hjvsUO>
- [REDACTED] is the partner (wife) of Bradley John Lemon, and is VOST Victoria Animal Welfare Officer/Partner. Rose's duties mainly involve managing the welfare of animals, and she also helps to maintain VOST Victoria's presence on Facebook. [REDACTED] made this statement for your consideration:

*"During the time of the Morwell mine fire, I worked in the capacity of Animal Welfare Officer for VOST Victoria, trying to locate a respite area for the animals of Morwell. I worked through Facebook, coordinating with DART and NARGA (other animal welfare orgs), trying to find a contact we could talk to regarding finding somewhere safe to take pets. We had had reports coming to us of people whos pets were wheezing and coughing and they just wanted somewhere safe, with clean air, for a short while. I started phoning around the Latrobe area trying to find a place that would allow people to bring Pets for respite. I phoned the Moe Raceclub as it would have been the perfect place but sadly, was turned down because of race meetings already booked. I called RSPCA customer Service to find out what had been set up for the residents and found myself talking to a Brisbane call centre, They directed me to the Burwood Shelter, through the same number who told me to call DEPI and gave me a 1 800 number. That number was the Victorian bushfire Info Line. There was no Info on respite for the animals though.*

*Finally I talked to a representative at the Morwell Town Hall, and was told that there was a tea station set up for people, but there was no animals allowed. People were welcome to come and have a cuppa but they would have to leave their pets at home. I was given the address of the Recovery Centre in Morwell and asked to call them. Still no help for the animals.*

*From there, I called the Leisure Centre, which was also being used as a recovery / evacuation centre and was told that they couldn't take animals either and to try calling the Department of Human*

*Services. I was given a phone number which turned out to be the Evacuation center, where a lovely lady named Kat wanted desperately to help me, but told me they had not been given any information on what to do with people with pets, and that they were unable to help me. Maybe I could try talking to the Latrobe City Council?*

*I phoned said council and received a recorded message telling me that their offices were shut and to try calling back during office hours. No emergency contact number. No help for the animals. It was days before I heard back from the Latrobe City council by phone call. I tried also to find respite for the animals not only through the Latrobe City Council's Facebook page, but through the Occupy Latrobe Facebook page and the Voices of the Valley Facebook Page. I reached out where ever I could. I, NARGA, and DART tried to find people who could take animals over a short period of time, to give them respite.*

*Eventually I turned my attention to asking the people themselves if they needed help? I posted on their Facebook forum. I asked them if their animals were sick; if they could access vets? How old their animals were? Other questions of that vein, that would give me an idea of how the smoke was still effecting them. What I heard was that cats had strange smelling urine, kidney infections; that one lady lost a whole hutch of rabbits, dead over night. Pet Birds were also dying. People were concerned for their pets. Some people couldn't afford to access a vet; others had transport issues. There wasn't any one they could go to that could give them the care their animals needed at that time. I was asked why the animals were not being tested for carbon monoxide? I couldn't answer them.*

*We posted, sometimes hourly, for many days asking for help. Trying to get some one to understand the importance of this. Animals lungs work differently to humans. They breathe faster, their lungs are smaller, the particles in the air effect them quicker and more severely.*

*We had people telling us of their cats with Kidney and Urinary infections; of asthma like symptoms in their Dogs and Cats; of birds being lethargic, slow , unresponsive. One of the signs of Carbon Monoxide poisoning in animals is, lethargy. These animals were clearly being effected by the smoke and ash. They needed help. And*



*we tried desperately to get it to them, only we kept being shunted around. Told to try this number and that number. Talk to this person or that person? Finally, I did get a phone call from Latrobe City Council, telling me that they had a person from DEPI looking into the Animal Respite Centre they were going to set up. I was excited and contacted DART and NARGA telling them that DEPI were onto it. They were going to help the animals. As far as I know nothing ever came of it. I tried to find out where this Centre was going to be? When it was going to be open? I couldn't get an answer. Only that DEPI were looking into it."* [REDACTED] 7th April, 2014.

- The VOST Victoria website ( <http://vostvic.net.au> ) generated 4,569 pageviews from just over 1,034 unique visitors during the five-week period of the mine-fire (9th Feb - Mar 17th). Nearly half of these views (2,170) were of a live info document ( <http://vostvic.net.au/morwell-open-cut-hazelwood-mine-fire-info> ) maintained by [REDACTED] which contained resources for the public in relation to the mine-fire. This info document was updated at least twice each day, and sometimes more often. We are not aware of this page ever being mentioned by mainstream media, although it was supported by the Department of Health Twitter account (@VicGovHealth), who retweeted an update of this page mentioned by the @VOSTVic Twitter account. The page was advertised by word of mouth on social media. Our job notes of key Twitter traffic for the mine-fire were not published on our website until the 17th March 2014.

Our members remain keen to contribute to the Latrobe Valley community, and to the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Bradley John Lemon  
Operations Manager/Partner  
VOST Victoria

[REDACTED]  
Tyabb VIC 3913  
[REDACTED]