



Fw: Morwell Mine Fire Submission

info to: [REDACTED]
Sent by: info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au

13/05/2014 10:38 AM

Submission.

----- Forwarded by [REDACTED] HAZELWOODINQUIRY on 13/05/2014 10:38 AM -----



Hazelwood Inquiry info/DPC@DTF

12/05/2014 02:42 PM

To Hazelwood Inquiry
info/DPC@DTF

cc

bcc

Subject Morwell Mine Fire Submission

Title: Ms

First Name: Pip

Surname: Carew

Organisation represented (if applicable): Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch)

Email address: [REDACTED]

Home or office phone: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Response to fire by Public Health Officials, Response to fire by Other Government Agencies, Other (please state)

If Other please state here: Ongoing monitoring of the health of the community

Longitudinal studies to monitor the long-term health effects
Establishing a database to record adverse health events
The adverse health effects arising from occupational exposure
Measures taken to protect employees
Financial compensation

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.

Upload Submission:

<http://hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/formidable/Submission-Hazelwood-12-05-14-complete.pdf>

User Information

User-Agent (Browser/OS): Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 9.0; Windows NT 6.1; WOW64; Trident/5.0)

Referrer:

<http://hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au/make-a-submission/online-submissions/>



Submission-Hazelwood-12-05-14-complete.pdf



**Australian
Nursing &
Midwifery
Federation**
VICTORIAN BRANCH

ANMF House
540 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Box 12600 A'Beckett Street PO
Melbourne Victoria 8006

www.anmfvic.asn.au
T 03 9275 9333
F 03 9275 9344
E records@anmfvic.asn.au

ABN 8057 1091192
RTO 3601

**ANMF (Vic Branch)
Submission to the
Board of Inquiry
into the Hazelwood
Coal Mine Fire**

12 May 2014

Contact:
Pip Carew
Assistant Secretary



Table of Contents

1	Executive summary	3
2	Introduction.....	4
3	ANMF (Vic Branch) survey summary.....	4
4	Response to the Board's specified matter number 4	5
5	Other	7
6	Conclusion	8
7	Recommendations	8
8	Appendices.....	10
9	References.....	10

1. Executive summary

The exposure to noxious pollutants imposed on members of the Morwell community as a result of the 45 day Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire in February and March 2014 resulted in very obvious short-term effects of ill health. Exposure resulted from either living or working or both, in affected areas.

The most common symptoms of ill health included respiratory problems, cough, sore and itchy eyes, headaches and nausea. In some cases the health effects were more severe such as respiratory difficulties and cardiac problems, which in some circumstances were an exacerbation of pre-existing medical conditions.

The long-term health effects of the significant level of exposure of poor air quality warrants ongoing health monitoring and at no expense to the individuals affected. Establishing a data base to contemporaneously register and record health care needs and management of individuals will enable proper monitoring of the health of the community and inform about the long-term health effects of the mine fire.

During the fire crisis, some community members suffered varying degrees of ill health requiring a range of health services including medical advice, medications, clinical investigation services and in some cases hospitalisation. Whilst some of these services were provided free to the community, some costs of treatment have been carried by the individuals affected.

The financial burden is an unfair impost and should be borne by the Victorian government, at least until such time the question of liability is resolved. This includes bearing ongoing costs in the event demand for treatment is required in the future as a result of exposure.

The Inquiry into the fire must consider the criticism from members of the public that the information and communication about health risks and air quality was inadequate, particularly during the initial stages of the emergency situation. The theme from many in the community was that the government was slow to respond to the health needs of the community¹, with confusion heightened by the mismatch between the experience of ill health living and working in a community engulfed in fumes and at the same time the Health Minister rejecting the calls to evacuate the community². Confusion about personal safety was understandable when health authorities provided the advice to implement strategies to manage symptoms of ill health by reducing activity, seeking medical advice and staying indoors and later for some citizens to relocate, yet maintained that there were no long-term health risks³.

Both domestic and extensive international air pollution studies⁴ such as World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer, confirm the risks to health and compel the Victorian government to acknowledge the high exposure levels of air pollution have exposed the community to significant long-term health risks. Health monitoring and treatment measures are the responsibility of government. Open and ongoing communication and education strategies must occur to inform the community of the risks as well as education for health care workers who are and will be providing care to the community.

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2014-03-23/5331252>

² <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/minister-rejects-fire-health-risk-20140223-33amd.html>

³ <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/media/morwell-south-residents-advice-28-feb-2014.htm>

⁴ http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/pr221_E.pdf

The government must address the inequity of providing financial support to some members of the community and not others. Health care card holders and pensioners were provided financial assistance to relocate and assist with cleaning their houses whilst those ineligible for assistance had to fund relocation themselves.

Many individuals of course were not able to relocate and get any relief from the oppressive conditions due to a variety reasons including financial constraints, family and work commitments.

2. Introduction

The Victorian Branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation [ANMF (Vic Branch)] has over 69,000 members who are employed in the Health and Community Services Sector in Victoria. They are employed in a range of settings as registered nurses and / or midwives, enrolled nurses and personal care workers. Members' workplaces include public and private health organisations, such as acute hospitals, rehabilitation services, mental health services, residential aged care facilities, community health centres, local government authorities, private industry, general practitioner services, department of education and early childhood development, nursing agencies and a variety of other organisations.

The ANMF (Vic Branch) is concerned and advocates for public and workplace policy that is in the interests of the health and wellbeing of its members, as an occupational entitlement, as well as matters that affect the environmental health of the broader community.

The ANMF (Vic Branch) welcomes the state government's initiative to appoint a Board of Inquiry into the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire and the opportunity to contribute to specified matters outlined, including the adequacy and effectiveness of the response to the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire which is the focus of our submission.

The submission is informed by the information gathered from the spectrum of media reporting, media releases from non-government environmental agencies, Victorian government statements and bulletins, Environment Protection Authority website and news bulletins during the 45 day fire as well as the information provided to us from members. The primary source of the information has been gathered from a survey distributed to our members living in the area, of which 146 Victorian Branch members responded (a completion rate of 21%) (Appendix 1).

3. ANMF (Vic Branch) survey summary (Appendix 2)

(Note the attached summary of the responses received provide sample comments only in order to maintain confidentiality of respondents.)

The collated survey results from members living and working in Morwell and the Latrobe Valley revealed the majority of respondents, over 60%, experienced adverse health effects.

The most commonly identified signs and symptoms of ill health related to respiratory, cardiac, nosebleeds, nausea, headaches, sore / itchy eyes, cough, productive cough, hypertension and mental health issues. A further cohort experienced a range of other health problems including disrupted sleep, itchy skin, sinusitis, sore throat, ear infection, gastric upset, stress, fatigue and

mental health issues. The vast majority of sufferers experienced a combination of symptoms of ill health during the period.

In addition, respondents, when asked if they had any pre-existing health issues that were exacerbated during the crisis, reported worsening of medical conditions such as asthma, hay fever, eczema, cardiac condition, diabetes and hypertension, sinusitis, cough, migraines, depression, neuralgia and auto-immune disease.

Over 25% of those who experienced ill health sought medical attention primarily from a general practitioner as well as hospital attendance, community health centre and nurse on call. Medical attendance resulted in a range of services from hospital admissions and in one instance repeated presentations to the emergency department as well as clinical investigations such as chest X-ray and the dispensing of medications.

The spectrum of management of symptoms ranged from requiring time away from work on sick leave to self management of symptoms without absenteeism.

The pro-active management of symptoms as well as those experienced by family members was assisted in some cases by relocating to places where the air quality was not affected by the mine fire. Most of those who relocated did so either for day trips or for short periods of time, such as a weekend or on rostered days off, to gain some respite from the burden of feeling unwell as well as relief from the ever present smell and taste of ash and fumes in the air. Most of those who elected to temporarily absent themselves from their homes incurred a financial cost. For most survey respondents, the cost imposed was unsustainable for periods of time beyond 2-4 days. Some members reported they were unable to relocate due to financial constraints. Also short bursts away were slotted in to fit in with employment arrangements. Employment in some cases meant a resumption of exposure to the health risks associated with the pollutants and the particulate matter causing poor air quality from the fire.

4. Response to the Board's specified matter number 4

The adequacy and effectiveness of the response to the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire by:

i. *The owner, operator and licensee of the Hazelwood Coal Mine:*

The speculation about attributing responsibility is a matter of public interest to be resolved by the Inquiry. The owner and operator of the Hazelwood mine was largely absent from public scrutiny and provided limited comment⁵. There remains uncertainty about questions of accountability⁶ and compliance with regulations, corporate responsibility and the role of government in regulating the coal mine's health and safety functions requires resolution⁷. These questions can best be resolved by the Independent Inquiry.

The measures taken in respect of the health and well-being of the affected communities by:

⁵ <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/sorry-hazelwood-coalmine-owner-says-it-has-nothing-to-hide-20140303-340gr.html>

⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-27/mine-operator-may-be-asked-to-pay-for-morwell-fire/5289314>

⁷ <http://www.smh.com.au/business/coalmine-fires-and-other-disasters-predicted-by-state-government-report-20140502-37lci.html>

- iv. *Informing the affected communities of the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire and about its known effects and risks; and*
- v. *Responding to those effects on, and risks to, the affected communities.*

The question of satisfaction with the health updates provided to the community generated a mixed response from the ANMF (Vic Branch) survey, ranging from satisfaction with the content and the efficiency of information, including from the EPA and CFA, to the majority view that information was insufficient, inconsistent and without detail.

Many respondents identified themes of dissatisfaction including that the health updates did not provide all the information about health risks, consistent and regular information particularly in the first weeks was not available and that other information sources were not used, such as social media.

Some example comments from the survey:

Question 15: How satisfied were you with the health updates provided to the community? (Provide details)

- Comment 1 I think they were timely, and informed people of what was happening. Also offering places to get health checks or escape from the smoke.
- Comment 2 Not satisfied at all. I am a fit and healthy person who suffered ill-effects for 8 weeks. I don't think the EPA monitored the air pollution appropriately, the pollutants in the air were so strong they burnt my airways, yet the air quality would be reported as 'very good'. The messages to leave or stay were mixed and there was confusion over what we should do to keep our family safe.
- Comment 3 Not at all. Not enough factual information about the health effects or explanation to the real symptoms people were experiencing. Just telling the public "you may experience respiratory symptoms" is not enough information.
- Comment 4 Very basic and repetitive from the media. Was good to receive information from other informants ie facebook groups who seemed to have a more honest account of what was happening. Reporting there are no long-term affects was not accurate when they have no idea. Would have preferred honesty not just government jargon.

In addition, survey respondents provided suggestions for improving the assistance that could be provided by the government. These suggestions included broadening the spectrum of communication channels including social media, more detail and authenticity about the information provided and improved support for the broader community including financial support. Importantly, the community expressed the need for a quicker and more pro-active response by the government and the EPA in reporting detail about the air quality, including the exposure risks, to give confidence that all steps were being taken to honestly engage with the community.

Question 16: What information and assistance would you like to have received? (Provide details)

- Comment 1 I think that any information should be given as soon as practicably possible so that residents who are in possible danger (not from fire) but from the smoke and ash have an educated understanding. Assistance should also be provided for as quickly as possible too, because a lot of assistance became available after the peak had been reached and the amount of ash / smoke was subsiding.

- Comment 2 More honest information with greater detail for persons living in and around area. More assistance for those that are not on health care cards, there is a whole in-between class that are being missed because they don't have these cards. Especially with the clean up process. Assistance for smaller businesses. How come posties were stopped from their deliveries yet the residents throughout Morwell then had to go out in the air to the mail centre to collect mail. The smell was disgusting and I don't even live in Morwell.
- Comment 3 More info about plan for monitoring of long-term health effects of exposure in the future, especially for pregnant women and children.
- Comment 4 I would have liked the hospital that I work in to turn off the air conditioner or provide extractors as our ward filled with smoke often and the patients' and staffs' health issues were exacerbated...
- Comment 5 I would have liked an immediate response to the question of the health effects from the fumes and ash, and any long-term effect that we may be exposed to. I found that the answers from the health department were not really answering community concerns and no real decision was made until after 2 weeks. I think in terms of assistance I believe everyone should have been entitled to emergency assistance, we may earn more but that doesn't mean we have savings to use during an environmental emergency, my family had to use money that had should of paid the bills in order for us to leave just for the 8 days we were gone. We pay our taxes just like lower income earner.

5. Other

The uncertainty and preoccupation of the health risks that the community is now faced with warrants thorough attention by the government. All those exposed require ongoing monitoring and particularly citizens identified as having a greater exposure to risk such as children, the elderly, people with existing health problems and pregnant women.

Air pollution can affect the developing foetus via maternal exposure. Studies have shown a correlation between maternal exposure to air pollution, and pre-term birth, low birth weight and intra-uterine growth restriction. In addition, a longstanding line of evidence⁸ suggests that exposure to harmful levels of air pollutants accrued during sensitive periods of organ development may predispose an individual to developing certain cardiovascular pathologies in adulthood.

It is critical that the government implement longitudinal studies to monitor the long-term effects on children born to mothers who were exposed to the pollution. The length of time or the proximity to the site of the pollutant is not a key determinant of the likelihood of side effects in the child⁹. Maternal and child health nurses employed by shire councils will have an important role to play in this work and councils should be resourced accordingly to provide this health service.

In addition, the Inquiry should not overlook that exposure to health risks occurred in the course of undertaking work as employees. In the case of the nursing and midwifery workforce employed in a range of workplace settings including public health services, local government, GP practice and

⁸ Early Life Exposure to Air Pollution: How Bad is it? - <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3527658/>

⁹ Maternal exposure to nitrogen dioxide during pregnancy and offspring birth weight: comparison of two exposure models - <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20472526>

private hospitals and aged care providers, options for alternate work arrangements during the crisis were not possible.

Whilst it is acknowledged the situation imposed on the community was in part out of employers' control, exploration of possible measures taken to mitigate the adverse health effects experienced by employees required to provide care to the community in the course of their ordinary employment is of interest for future planning.

6. Conclusion

The public health issue of ensuring safe air quality is a fundamental responsibility of government. Implicit in that responsibility is the unquestionable provision of appropriate health and safety measures to avoid risk of ill health for citizens. Any risk that arises demands proper and comprehensive health and financial support to all those exposed.

In addition, the government's exposure to risk for liability warrants proper examination and recommendations regarding corporate responsibility to citizens' health and government regulation and protection. Integral to examining the role of business and government is the question of appropriateness for the coal industry to be supported in operating its industry in close proximity to the community.

7. Recommendations

1. Ongoing access to health programs and services for members of the community exposed to the health risks associated with the coal mine fire.
2. Development and maintenance of a data base to record the detail of health services already provided as well as future services to members of the community and to enable ongoing monitoring of the health of individuals and thereby providing information focussing on a contemporaneous rather than a retrospective study.
3. Government to implement longitudinal studies to monitor the long-term effects on children born to mothers who were exposed to the pollution.
4. Re-crediting of industrial entitlements such as sick leave when taken as a result of illness caused by the work environment and occupational exposure.
5. Employers to encourage and provide the opportunity for employees exposed to poor air quality in the course of their employment to complete incident reports to ensure no disadvantage if there is a need to access legislative rights.
6. Education and training for nurses and midwives and other health professionals about health risks from exposure to high levels of air pollutants to enable proper support to the community in the delivery of health programs and clinical management.
7. Victorian government adopts the practice of informing Victorian communities of the exact nature of risks to health, based on evidence of health studies, rather than the current practice of issuing advisory warnings only.

8. Financial compensation to those who suffered from exposure to the poor and toxic air quality as a consequences of the mine fire for:
 - i. Relocation costs, including any temporary relocation for relief from the poor air quality and symptoms of ill health experienced by individuals and families either self-initiated or as a result of medical advice.
 - ii. Any costs associated with GP visits, hospital admissions, other health services.
 - iii. Pharmaceuticals purchased to treat adverse health effects from environmental pollution.
 - iv. Clean-up costs relating house / property / tank water / any other relevant associated costs.
 - v. Veterinarian costs for livestock and pets.
9. Ongoing financial support for medical and related expenses as a result of exposure to health risks associated with fire.
10. Government commitment in future to provide equity of opportunity for all members of the community to access financial support for all related expenses as a result of coal industry environmental disaster, including relocation costs irrespective of whether the decision is based on medical advice or an independent decision to self-manage health and safety.
11. A review of the state government's emergency information processes including:
 - i. Expand media distribution mediums to ensure maximum access to all members of the community.
 - ii. Content of information that includes clear and accurate updates about health risks and services available.
 - iii. Co-ordination of regular and consistent information.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1

ANMF (Vic Branch) Questionnaire – Hazlewood Coal Mine Fire

Appendix 2

Sample summary of responses to Questionnaire – Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire

9. References

- Climate and Health Alliance, Submission to Senate Standing Committees Community Affairs, *Inquiry into the impacts on health of air quality in Australia*, March 2013 http://caha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/CAHA-Submission-Air-Quality-March-2013_final.pdf accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://dea.org.au/news/article/coal-mine-fires-remind-us-of-coals-threat-to-our-environment-climate-and-he> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://journalists.medianet.com.au/DisplayAttachment.aspx?j=795992&s=2&k=1904565> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/latrobe-valley-key-messages-19-2.html> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://theconversation.com/victorias-coal-fire-poses-a-rare-challenge-for-firefighting-23698> accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/183922121?selectedversion=NBD51863114> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-12/cfa-firefighters-treated-for-carbon-monoxide-exposure-fighting-/5255108> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-27/mine-operator-may-be-asked-to-pay-for-morwell-fire/5289314> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2014-03-23/5331252> accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/42476.html> accessed 4 May 2014
- http://www.aie.org.au/AIE/Documents/FS3_COAL.pdf accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://www.australasianscience.com.au/article/issue-march-2014/hazelwood-coal-fire-health-impacts.html> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.epa.gov/air/particlepollution/> accessed 4 May 2014
- Melbourne Mortality Study, *Effects of ambient air pollution on daily mortality in Melbourne – 1991-1996*
- <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/our-work/publications/publication/2000/june/709> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/air/air-pollution/particles-in-air> accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer/alerts/alert-2014-02-smoke-warning-latrobevalley.htm> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood/ash-fall-out.htm> accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/media/morwell-south-residents-advice-28-feb-2014.htm> accessed 10 May 2014
- http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/pr221_E.pdf accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/02/27/comment-wake-and-smell-coal-smoke> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.smh.com.au/business/coalmine-fires-and-other-disasters-predicted-by-state-government-report-20140502-37lci.html> accessed 10 May 2014
- <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/minister-rejects-fire-health-risk-20140223-33amd.html> accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/sorry-hazelwood-coalmine-owner-says-it-has-nothing-to-hide-20140303-340gr.html> accessed 4 May 2014
- <http://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2014/03/08/why-morwell-burning/1394197200#.U2XeRcsaySM> accessed 4 May 2014

Questionnaire – Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire

Questionnaire for Members who may be affected by the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire:
This questionnaire relates to the 45 days in February and March 2014 when the fire at the Hazelwood Coal mine resulted in generating smoke, fumes, ash and toxins in the town of Morwell and surrounding areas.

Are you a resident of Morwell or Latrobe Valley?

- Yes
- No

Do you work in Morwell / Latrobe Valley / other?

- Morwell
- LaTrobe valley
- Other

If other, please specify:

Where do you work / which health service do you work in?

Are you a:

- Nurse
- Midwife
- PCA

What is your area of practice?

Did you experience any adverse health effects?

- Yes

No

If yes, what health effects did you have:

- Respiratory
- Cardiac
- Nose bleeds
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Sore/ itchy eyes
- Cough/ productive cough
- Hypertension
- Mental health issues
- Other

If other, please specify:

Do you have any pre-existing health issues that were exacerbated during this time?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please specify:

Did you require additional medical assistance during the fire?

- Yes
- No

If yes: what medical assistance did you require eg GP, hospital, community health centre, nurse on call?

Did you have family members that suffered health effects?

- Yes
- No

Did you or your family relocate for all or anytime during the fire?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please provide details

How satisfied were you with the health updates provided to the community? (Provide details)

What information and assistance would you like to have received? (Provide details)

1. Are you a resident of Morwell or Latrobe Valley? YES 139 NO 7
2. Do you work in Morwell / Latrobe Valley / other? MORWELL 34 LATROBE 95 OTHER 17
3. Where do you work / which health service do you work in?
- Aged care
 - Central Gippsland health service
 - Nursing agency.
 - Community mental health
 - Victorian Government
 - General Practice
 - Latrobe Regional Hospital
 - Local Government
 - Community Health
 - Maryvale Private Hospital
 - Warragul Hospital
 - West Gippsland Hospital
4. Are you a Nurse, Midwife, PCA? NURSE 128 NURSE & MIDWIFE 5 MIDWIFE 7 PCA 5

5. What is your area of practice?

- Mental health nurse
- Student
- Community Mental Health
- Aged care
- Paediatrics and Special Care Nursery
- Hospital in the home
- General Practice nurse
- Critical care
- MCH
- Community nursing
- Midwifery
- Haemodialysis
- Dialysis
- Emergency
- Respiratory
- Medical nursing
- Peri-operative Nursing
- Operating Suite
- Surgical
- Radiotherapy
- Palliative
- Orthopaedics
- Oncology
- Rehabilitation
- Chronic disease

6. Did you experience any adverse health effects? YES 92 NO 51

7. Did you experience any adverse health effects?

- RESPIRATORY
- CARDIAC
- NOSEBLEEDS
- NAUSEA
- HEADACHES
- SORE/ITCHY EYES
- COUGH/PRODUCTIVE COUGH
- HYPERTENSION
- MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
- OTHER

(below)

- Sore dry throat.
- Lethargy, depression
- General unwellness, lethargic. Gastro symptoms, flu like symptoms.
- Sore throat, unusual taste in mouth
- Infected sinuses
- Itchy skin
- Disrupted sleep
- Fatigue, stress

8. Do you have any pre-existing health issues that were exacerbated during this time? YES 37 NO 108

9. If Yes, please specify :

- Eczema
- Asthma
- Asthma, which has been well controlled up to when the fire started,
- Hayfever
- Cardiac
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Allergies
- Increased fatigue, joint pain etc
- Migraines more frequently
- Neuralgia

10. Did you require additional medical assistance during the fire? YES 25 NO 121

11. If yes: what medical assistance did you require eg GP, hospital, community health centre, nurse on call?

- GP
- Emergency Department
- Hospital admission
- Nurse on call

12. Did you have family members that suffered health effects? YES 78 NO 68

13. Did you or your family relocate for all or anytime during the fire? YES 41 NO 105

14. If yes, please provide details

Relocated to family in Melbourne for a short time

Went away every second weekend.

Spent all off duty time out of valley

Family relocated for 4 weeks

Got out of the area when able

Worked from an alternate site where the air quality was better

JUST DAY TRIPS AND A WEEKEND AWAY FROM THE LATROBE VALLEY

I relocated while off sick from work

To motel one weekend

Left the area with my children for as long as I could, mostly 3-4 day stints as commitments allowed.

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

We relocated for 1 week

When the fire warning was high and I was not rostered on, I relocated with my son for a couple of days

For a couple of days each week I had to leave Traralgon (my place of residence) area and stay with family. I experience respiratory problems which slightly improved while away.

Grandparents went interstate.

I relocated my family after 2 weeks of tolerating the conditions in morwell.

went to various friends' places for weekend respite

My daughter who lives in Morwell moved to Traralgon for 2 days

Did relocate for day trips to other areas to have some respite from the smoke.

Spent 4 days in a hired beach house

Some of my inlaws tried to stay away for a lot of the time, when they could afford it. Extended family also tried to stay at their holiday house as much as possible.

We made many day trips away from the vally including trips to stay with relatives a few nights here and there. Got expensive, we dont have a lot of money but do not qualify for the health care card as we both work so got no extra funding.

Taking respite at holiday houses of our friends and family

Daughter is usually a well controlled asthmatic, but she became very unwell and could not control it with her usual medications. She had to seek other treatment with her GP.

We stayed on a family members property out of area and commuted to work.

I went away for 5 days

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

Unable to afford

Left town

Spent two days in East Gippsland to have a break from acrid smell and smoke. Privately funded.

Mother relocated

Evacuated from our home on Sunday February 9 when fire threatened our home.

We relocated valuables and papers nearby to sons home.

Yes, to traralgon and inverloch

The facility where I work was evacuated.

not financially feasible.

My grandparents were relocated as they live in Morwell

Weekends away

15. How satisfied were you with the health updates provided to the community? (Provide details)

Satisfied

I think the services provided were efficient

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

Not very. Not enough information in the general public forum. Visitors from EPA and CFA visited our school during a family bbq and provided excellent information.

Needed to be open to all people of the LV not only Morwell as I had to travel past mine and through smoke, and shop in Morwell. where my town also was effected by smoke and ash. There needed to be open communication of all results. Was happy CFA showed thermal imaging of fire, helped from relief of the scare mongering.

Not really. I think that there was a lot of information that the community as a whole felt they didn't receive that was available to others at the time of the mine fire.

I think they were timely and informed people of what was happening also offering places to get health checks or escape from the smoke

Not very, I think the whole situation was handled badly. Towards the end, the information was better, this quality of information should have been provided all the way through.

Towards the end of the month updates were good, was just a pity they couldn't have been honest and done something earlier.

It could have been better, as it mainly focused on Morwell, but it affected Churchill, and other areas just as bad

I am satisfied with the updates provided to the community yet i'm not so sure whether the true toxic affect of this situation has completely come to the fore. I'd like to know what strategies are in place to avoid similar circumstances in the future.

Very dissatisfied.

I think the government were to slow to relocate people, especially elderly, children, pregnant women during the fire.

Satisfied

Not really not much info passed on. The most frustrating thing for lots of people were the ridiculous speed limits!

I think what was done with regards to the health services provided was the best that could be done under the circumstances. So i was very satisfied.

I felt that the health updates were scripted and edited heavily before being provided, sometimes belatedly to the community.

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

Very dissatisfied. EPA monitoring was very slow to get started and then didn't have current air quality readings, so it was useless. Health warnings and advice issued was often contradictory

Dissatisfied. Government and local authorities slow to react. Would have been a different story if it was in Melbourne.

Family still in area we're not satisfied

Very satisfied

Yes they did the best that they could with the information and services that were available

Very satisfied

satisfied

Quite satisfied but the working for Latrobe City we received lots of updates via email, website and by being addressed by health officials eg including Ms Lester at Headquarters in Morwell.

INFORMATION WAS PRETTY SCARSE TO BEGIN. INFORMATION IMPROVED AS THE REALISATION THAT THE MINE FIRE WAS NOT GOING TO BE A SHORT TERM ISSUE.

Not detailed or frequent enough

I wasn't happy, I thought there was too bigger time frame in regards to air quality information. EPA site stated air quality either not noted or good when it was later stated air quality was not good

Adequate

Some extremely confusing - eg, status as all clear yet warnings given for extreme smoke conditions?

health updates were adequate for me but perhaps not for those living closer to the fire itself. Although most people i visited whilst this was going on didn't seem to concerned or affected by the fire.

Fairly satisfied. Although updates could have been a bit more regular.

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

They were reasonable in the circumstances

Not satisfied as there was no real information about hazardous gas / particulate long term effects. It was just brushed over when mentioned. Also public meetings were disgusting with attendance by those who just wanted to scream and yell and not listen ... Actually a very scary forum St times

Not satisfied, thought they were very poor, not accurate

I thought they were well informed.

I feel I was well informed.

happy with updates

Not satisfied at all. I am a fit and healthy person who suffered ill-effects for 8 weeks. I don't think the EPA monitored the air pollution appropriately, the pollutants in the air were so strong they burnt my airways, yet the air quality would be reported as 'very good'. The messages to leave or stay were mixed and there was confusion over what we should do to keep our family safe.

Pretty satisfied. I think there could have been a quicker response to the situation though.

Not very satisfied

Not enough information giving to the community via news, not kept up to date.

Not very

The information was adequate.

There was an initial delay but the information trickled through after that

Very satisfied.

Adequately satisfied

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

Not impressed

I don't believe I was provided with many health updates besides those that were on social media, mostly posted by people angry about the situation and not necessarily accurate information

Didn't even hear of any until after the first week

Not very satisfied at all!

yes

There was very little acknowledgement of adverse side effects and little available services to assist with those affected.

The cfa-facebook updates were great sources of information. The local paper also very good

Not very - was vague and broad. EPA levels in Traralgon were not recorded at 2.5 levels and there were days that my children were at school in unsatisfactory air pollution levels

I felt that the local community was left in the dark about the seriousness of the air quality and that exposure for the first 2 weeks was downplayed.

not very satisfied

Satisfied

I was bewildered that the air quality was deemed safe when it was so thick and foul smelling

As this type of incident has not occurred before I believe every effort was made to provide as much detail that was available at the time to the public. Due to this unfortunate incident I believe the appropriate services are better informed and equipped (if and hopefully not again in the future, thankfully it wasn't nuclear!)

Average

Seemed wishy/washy no real definitions as to the overall effects.

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

Not at all. Not enough factual information about the health effects or explanation to the real symptoms people were experiencing. Just telling the public "you may experience respiratory symptoms" is not enough information.

Not very satisfied. Not much was told for a very long time, and things took far too long to be out in place.

Not satisfied at all.

Not very. Information was hard to find and slow to be released. Later on during the 45 day period more information was more easily found/presented.

Very basic and repetitive from the media. Was good to receive information from other informants ie facebook groups who seemed to have a more honest account of what was happening. Reporting there are no long term affects was not accurate when they have no idea, would have preferred honesty not just government jargon.

Not satisfied

I felt the updates were sketchy and i felt the community were being given the minimum of information. I felt the authorities were trying to prevent the community from panicking or from taking legal action.

satisfied

Health updates continually stated that the smoke was not dangerous or toxic. Why then did we suffer so many symptoms. Since when has Carbon Monoxide safe!!! Animals were the forgotten victims! Dirty ash in water bowls causing sickness to household pets.

Health updates continually stated that the smoke was not dangerous or toxic. Why then did we suffer so many symptoms. Since when has Carbon Monoxide safe!!! Animals were the forgotten victims! Dirty ash in water bowls causing sickness to household pets.

Linked to <https://www.facebook.com/eyewatchlatrobe> <https://www.facebook.com/ABCGippsland> <https://www.facebook.com/VicGovHealth>

The updates were reasonable, although there was no official update or information on the situation given to staff at the hospital as far as I know. There was no notice of information on the toxicity of the smoke and it was certainly pungent, very very strong smelling. I did not see a flyer to update staff for smoke management from burning coal dust.

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

Relatively satisfied.

Could have been more information for Traralgon which is only 10minutes from morwell. Most reports were on morwell.

Health updates were very limited.

Satisfied with updates and used common sense which alot more people should have done .

Yes and no

Very dissatisfied

Satisfactory

they were ok

Believe we were 'kept in the dark' in relation to what they wanted us to know!

very satisfied

Satisfied. Surprised CFA / agencies weren't more organised with health protocols which allowed media to stir up anxiety in population.

Fine

All details late and non reliable.

Seemed to be extensive delay before any "real" information was provided.

No action for the first two weeks. Then informed, but doubtful authorities themselves were sure of their advise.

Not satisfied, inadequate updates and information

Very satisfied with health updates once the EPA finally decided to give more precise information on smaller particle matter in the smoke and dust

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

They didn't change anything, had to work there still

Response was slow, information limited for the elderly or ethnic groups

Very real information given.

Reasonably satisfied, although, EPA listings were a little hard to figure out, also, I feel we were not notified of health risks early enough.

I feel initially the information provided to the community was unsatisfactory and can understand why some felt neglected. Once the situation was recognized by government as serious I feel information was provided in a timely and detailed manner across a variety of media.

Very, it allowed me to make informed decision on the day as to whether I would spend more or less time outdoors.

Health information was adequate, given that we really couldn't control the situation, but had to learn to live with it. Advice to 'close all doors and windows' was not practical in the long term; it became too hot and stuffy because we were also advised to not use air conditioning devices or even fans. We tended to open & shut windows depending on the level of smoke and smell. Sometimes we had no choice, and just left the windows open and accepted the smell, smoke & ash as part of living in Morwell. Advice to use masks was ridiculous, in my opinion! Most masks may have reduced the amount of large particles which otherwise would have been ingested, but would otherwise do NOTHING! Gasses and small particles would have passed straight through the fibres, or otherwise been inhaled or ingested as they passed around the mask, as NONE of them had an air-tight seal to the face. If a client or patient requested a mask, I was more than happy to provide one, and encourage them to use it for their comfort. I did not discourage anybody from wearing masks, despite their very limited therapeutic benefit.

Very

They tended to be repetitive and not always that informative

Reasonable. Was disappointed no help was given to Traralgon residents - I'm more worried about long term effects

Satisfied

They were ok

Happy with the CFA updates via facebook and local news updates

not satisfied. needed more information faster and open information about possible adverse effects.

Poor. The whole situation was ignored for the first week, until media became involved.

Initially the response was slow, especially when the smoke was visible along with ash, The EPA were slow with their updates, but due to public response finally got their act into place.

Satisfied as there were regular updates on the radio.

Not very, lots of miss information

Not effective

Very Satisfied

Updates were good but came to late and tired of health minister saying that we were not at risk. What a load of rubbish. I would like to see her live her through what we went through. And yes I'm angry as some of us were treated differently.

No didn't receive any

16. What information and assistance would you like to have received? (Provide details)

nil

More updated info on the radio, rather than the repetitive message that told us nothing. Better coverage of the events in the local newspaper, including the true health effects.

I think that any information should be given as soon as practicably possible so that residents who are in possible danger (not from fire) but from the smoke and ash have an educated understanding. Assistance should also be provided for as quickly as possible too, because a lot of assistance became available after the peak had been reached and the amount of ash/smoke was subsiding.

More honest information with greater detail for persons living in and around area. More assistance for those that are not on health care cards, there is a whole in-between class that are being missed because they don't have these cards. Especially with the clean up process. Assistance for smaller businesses'. How come posties were stopped from their deliveries yet the residents throughout Morwell then had to go out in the air to the mail centre to collect mail.... The smell was disgusting and I don't even live in Morwell.

the honest readings and information from the start of the fire not near the end.

More information on the exactly toxins in the fly ash.

Clear targeted information in order to inform assistance to our client group Information on how to manage our own health during crisis

The Latrobe Valley community and especially those living close to the mine should have been better supported and kept informed of the situation much earlier in the process.

Should have been financial, relocation and clean up assistance for all who were directly affected not just those on government handouts.

Government should have acted quickly to put out fire. Even asking Fed Govt for assistance. Using armed services and disaster resources to quickly extinguish blaze. We only obtained info from TV and reports were sketchy at best. Made us feel like the welfare of rural people is not so important to city based governments.

Common sense for the greater public would be good to see. And for people to stop being so money hungry.

We were not entitled to any assistance therefore could not relocate and we feel that we were severely effected by smoke & ash every day . The stress related issues with myself having to travel each day.

earlier advice the information that Morwell south was affected more than other areas of the town and why only assistance to health card holders dhs was advising people to leave but made their workers stay & work in the same areas where warning were being given out

I still cannot believe that the health department was saying that the smoke is not detrimental to health. Workers in the power industry know that coal smoke from well burned coal is not good to breathe, so surley partially burned in an uncontrolled situation cannot be good. I would have preferred true information not the political speak that all is ok

Not enough information given to the general public earlier when the fire first started. I could not access any assistance as I was not over 65 Yrs old, not a HACC recipient and did not hold a Health Care Card !

Up to dateand now the long term effects

as we visit a large area of the community, some areas more effected by the fire than others, the hospital was slow to provide masks for staff visiting the morwell area.

More info about plan for monitoring of long term health effects of exposure in the future, especially for pregnant women and children

More health effects long term information and strategies that can be put in place if problems occur. I feel for the members of Morwell who were ineligible for any assistance due to the guidelines that were put in place. I feel some were put at risk because of work / volunteering commitments that didn't enable relocation. Schools in the town should also have been relocated earlier .. As no mine fire is extinguished in a short time

Clean interior house, clean air conditioning, provision of timely information, to many varied sources of contradictory information

I believe I was given all the information I required. I did not require any assistance.

Exactly what was in the air (besides carbon monoxide), what the long term health effects will be, how the mine owners intend to rehabilitate the mine now.

It would have been appropriate to have recieved updates so that we could have communicated them to our patients.

Long term effects of coal smoke exposure, more assistance for those living in morwell to relocate from the the effects of smoke.

Assistance to surrounding towns TOO! Traralgon was just as affected as Morwell was, but not as bad with the ash. Also, more communication on the situation. E.g. SMS 's Information on Facebook was not changed to suit any changes in the situation in the weeks following the original incident.

The long term effects of the repeated exposure to the high levels of CO in the air and the mine. Up to date information and health warnings. Side effects of the levels listed and given/shown on TV.

More information about the air quality

Initial clear warnings about the potential of the smoke from the open cut to cause health issues so that people could be forewarned and take action.

How long the fires would take to be under control, and more information about financial assistance available.

Information on what to do, through home visits or road shows.

Perhaps letterbox drops to all residents in the Latrobe Valley explaining potential health risks and where to seek assistance. I am well aware but I think other residents may not be aware of local health services besides the emergency room at the hospital

I would have liked the hospital that I work in to turn off the air conditioner or provide extractors as our ward filled with smoke often and the patients and staffs health issues were exacerbated. I would have liked more support as far as the road closures went. Staff and fire volunteers found it difficult to get to work or fire staff to get to their areas

More warnings and education about the side effects associated with smoke inhalation! Im aware payments were made to those who receive Centerlink benefits, a one off payment, but those of us just scrapping by received nothing yet we are still impacted by the fire.

Would have liked to have more broadcasting of potential harm. Early intervention and relocation of people living close to the fires sooner.

Better EPA recording levels for Traralgon. Mandatory procedures (such as keep all children indoors at school when air pollution levels were high) and quicker communication methods when air pollution levels reached unsatisfactory levels. (i.e through mobile phone).

I would have liked an immediate response to the question of the health effects from the fumes and ash, and any long-term effect that we maybe exposed to. I found that the answers from the health dept. were not really answering community concerns and no real decision was made until after 2 weeks. I think in terms of assistance i believe everyone should have been entitled to emergency assistance, we may earn more but that doesn't mean we have savings to use during an environmental emergency, my family had to use money that had should of paid the bills in order for us to leave just for the 8 days we were gone. We pay our taxes just like lower income earner.

some true information in terms of updates and health hazards

What was put out there was pretty good for the unemployed or retired, but bad luck if you worked, you still had to go to work. Also that many insurance companies didnt consider ash/soot in roof cavities a claimable item, even though this can cause roof fires with insulation.

Compensation - petrol vouchers would have been good for relocation costs of activities. I AM NOT a healthcare card holder so I did not receive any assistance what.so ever even though I was breathing the same air as the HEALTHCARE CARD HOLDERS!

As I didn't live in "South Side" of Morwell I didn't qualify for financial assistance to relocate despite pre-existing health problems. Assistance should have been available for all residents affected despite location or financial background. More open information of the actual health effects that people were really experiencing. Better information on the actual toxic contents of the smoke and the ash that is covering my home and the real long term health effects

Any information and support from the government.

More information on long term effects and how wide an area was being affected. Also any known measures to lower effects on people. I did not realise I was affected by the smoke and ash until about a week after the fire was out and my cough disappeared!

Information regarding people on sole tank water and affects of ash in water. Affects on animals as living on a farm all our animals seemed lethargic and unwell.

How bad the smoke was- EPA monitoring did not start till two weeks in.

The information was not easy to access. They would of been better off having more information on the radio (eg. the local ABC as they do on bushfire alerts)

Relocation Assistance and clean up assistance should be available to everyone not just health care card holders. People who were forced to stay in the area to work were more penalised because we had no choice to leave!!

Relocation Assistance and clean up assistance should be available to everyone not just health care card holders. People who were forced to stay in the area to work were more penalised because we had no choice to leave!!!

When the Carbon Monoxide poisoning happened a lot more information about the amount detected in the air, but more importantly the particulates in the air were overlooked and the whole community should have switched over their air conditioning units to internal recycling of

air a lot quicker than when it happened. Why was DHS the only Govt depart given time off from work and the place shut down when many other Govt dept kept working and open to the public? The Govt had also done many things well such as setting up the health check centres.

I would have liked to have known what exactly we were breathing in. The car was covered in the coal dust for weeks.

Local residents of Latrobe Valley have experienced open cut mine fires in the past so we pretty much know what to do. Any local or government assistance is obviously appreciated.

I would have liked more information on normal carbon monoxide poisoning. Whether I should have relocated when we're 10minutes away. Some days it was terribly smokey when the wind blew towards our house

Daily updates on air quality.

The assistance offered to the people of Morwell did seem a bit slow to arrive. Following the fire, the only people who received assistance to clean up were those on health Care Card/pensioner. I fail to see why those who work are less deserving of cleanup assistance. This has generated a lot of discontent. Also the arbitrary line of the 'south side' residents means that many people in Morwell may have been unaffected by fires by the government definition, but still have extra cleaning following the fire. In my opinion they also deserve assistance.

I would have liked air quality levels in Moe to be revealed.

The truth not political bullshit, when the area was deemed "Safe" to return the fire was still going and continues to go and the smell is horrid and still in the air.

Just a more organised release of information.

Financial support to cover cost of medication

More info with regards to how one operates a health care facility when air conditioners are "pumping" smoke into the Operating Rooms.

Carbon monoxide monitoring for staff and patients at work. Air filters earlier at work.

Just would have been good to receive it in a more timely manner

Full and open reassurance or advise from day one so everybody could take measures to protect their health

Regular factual updates and related advice and services

Daily hard copy of air quality , for the elderly and non speaking English Electronic up dates not suited for this group.

Better assistance for those who were affected. People from other areas were receiving funding. Those who nearest the fire should have received assistance first. Rather than those living on the other side of mor well.

I think the general population should have been kept up to date with exactly what was going on, as it was happening.

As a member of the hospital community I was not exposed to any internally generated information as to the overall situation and or the hospital's response plans. This would have been nice.

None

Realistic information of likelihood of being impacted by severe symptoms. Most of the information on the websites pointed towards carbon monoxide poisoning, which was highly unlikely for the vast majority of the community. Common-sense information would have been helpful, rather than the media-hype which was far more readily available, and in your face. The situation was unpleasant, but nowhere near as bad as has been made out to be in reporting articles. I myself suffered from several bouts of headaches, attributed to the smoke & smell of burning coal (NOT 'tar' as was reported several times) which I treated with paracetamol and ibuprofen, as well as feeling lethargic and tired. Whether from physical or psychological stress I cannot say. I also experienced several days of wheeziness and cough, treated with ventolin. I also experienced one episode of severe nausea and vomiting on waking one morning, with no cause other than exposure to smoke/particles & toxins in the air. Mildly irritated eyes was common, and I treated these with eye drops available from the chemist.

I think too often the focus was too much on low income group of the population For those of us who had no option to relocate (as we have employment) weren't considered regardless of where we lived in the town. Almost as though there was this invisible line between the newly invented Morwell South and the rest of the town. There were increased risks for those closest but the whole town was affected.

Help cleaning and money for medications

none extra than CFA updates

Relocation options, fast and truthful information about possible side effects. Help to residents of surrounding towns, not just Morwell. Some of the money/benefits went straight to unaffected people in Morwell and not those that needed it.

Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Questionnaire- Responses received as at 2.5.14

The correct masks to filter the air. SMS/email regarding health effects etc. More services available for respite and information. More access to health care (for the people in Morwell)

quicker response time from the Health Dept, and the EPA

I would have liked to have been relocated, I am not on a health care card, so I got no assistance. I also would like to have free vet checks for my animals, as they were also effected by this fire

What effects the ash and smoke has on people's health long term? What effect it has on our pets? Whether the thick ash could clog up people's motors and or infrastructure?

I would like financil assistance to dry clean my drapes as they smell of smoke. Theirs no assistance for people who work. Some people got assistance with relocation but i didn't come under that category.

Help to relocate and cleaning services and air purifiers