

Morwell mine fire update

The bushfire that started west of Morwell and spread into the Morwell mine on the afternoon of Sunday 9 February continues to burn, producing significant smoke and ash that is impacting on surrounding communities.

This is one of the most serious fire situations ever confronted at the Morwell mine and GDF SUEZ Hazelwood is working closely with the CFA and MFB to extinguish smouldering mine faces as quickly as we can. I cannot speak too highly of all those who have worked tirelessly to first bring the fire under control and who are now tackling the challenging task of extinguishing the fire.

At the same, we fully understand the inconvenience and concern that the smoke from the fire has caused for people living in surrounding areas. As several other Victorian communities have experienced in recent times as a result of major bushfires, the level of smoke is directly related to the severity and intensity of the fires. I assure you that GDF SUEZ Hazelwood is committed to working with all relevant authorities to reduce the level of smoke as quickly as we can.

There are many questions being asked in the community about various aspects of the fire and the fire-fighting response. This open letter to the Latrobe Valley community aims to answer some of those key questions.

● What is the current status of the fire?

The fire has been contained but continues to burn on two worked out faces of the mine. An area of some 150 hectares has been affected, with the fire spread over some 2.5 km on three levels of the mine. The fire is a distance of some three kilometres from the mine operating face. The task now is to progressively extinguish the smouldering faces.

● What caused the fire and how was it able to spread?

While the cause of the fire will be the subject of investigations, it is believed that the fire was caused by embers entering the mine from the bushfire west of Morwell. This ember attack, fanned by high winds, is believed to have rapidly caused a number of spot fires across the Northern and South-eastern areas of the mine.

● Does Hazelwood have a fire prevention and protection strategy in place?

Yes, GDF SUEZ Hazelwood has a comprehensive fire prevention and protection strategy incorporating a number of proactive processes in place including fire detection, fire prevention and fire mitigation measures. These processes include regular patrols, fire watch, fire alerts, and sprays to protect the operational and non operational areas and reduce dust levels in the mine's exposed coal faces. Hazelwood's focus is at all times on ensuring the safety of people, along with ensuring supply of power and protection of property and infrastructure.

● What is being done to extinguish the fire?

Some 200 CFA and MFB firefighters have joined with 80 mine personnel to jointly fight the fire around the clock over the past week and a half. The best available fire-fighting equipment sourced from all over Victoria and some from interstate has been brought to the fire-fight. This includes a range of aerial fire suppression involving long-line helicopters and sky-cranes.

● How long will that take?

It will take significant time and effort to extinguish as the coal needs to be cooled with large quantities of water being applied over an extended period to prevent re-ignition. Experience suggests it could take up to two weeks or more to completely extinguish.

● What is being done to reduce the level of smoke?

While the fire-fighting authorities are doing all they can to minimise smoke leaving the mine, weather and atmospheric conditions will be the major determinant of the level of smoke.

● Have fire-fighters been affected by carbon monoxide?

Ongoing monitoring of all those involved in the fire-fighting operation has resulted in a number of personnel being taken to hospital for testing and observation. There have been no reports of any serious impacts of carbon monoxide. Personal and area monitoring is continuing to ensure the safety of all those involved.

● Has the fire affected mining and power station operations?

Coal supply was interrupted in the initial stages when we lost power supply to the mine. However, this was quickly rectified and coal dredgers and power station generating units have been back in normal operation for more than a week.

● Will there be an investigation into the fire and its impact on surrounding communities?

Yes. An investigation will be conducted as soon as possible, taking into account the current focus on extinguishing the fire and ensuring the protection of people and property.

● Why Hasn't Hazelwood been represented at the two community meetings?

These meetings were principally called to provide information on any health concerns that local residents may have. Hazelwood has been working closely with the CFA and other agencies, by providing information as appropriate. In the case of these meetings, it was felt that health concerns of Morwell residents and Latrobe Valley communities are best handled by the appropriate health authorities.

● Where can I get more information?

A number of authorities have information lines to respond to specific queries. They are:

- Victorian Bushfire Information line **1800 240 667**
- Environment Protection Authority (EPA) **1300 372 842**
- Nurse on Call 24 hours a day, seven days a week **1300 606 024**
- Department of Health **1300 253 942**
- State Environment Health Unit **1300 761 874**

GDF SUEZ Hazelwood fully understands the Latrobe Valley community's concerns about the current situation. I assure you we are committed to continuing this major operation to extinguish the fire as quickly as we can.



George Graham
Asset Manager
GDF SUEZ Hazelwood

