

Community Information Newsletter

Latrobe Valley Open Cut Mine Fires

6:00PM

Friday 14th February 2014

Roads

While the recent fire has caused damage to vegetation, signs and safety barriers along the Princes Freeway at Morwell, VicRoads advise there has been no damage to the surface of the road.

Works to remove vegetation and repair signs and safety barriers will be undertaken in the coming weeks. While these works are being undertaken, some lane closures and reduced speed limits will be required for the safety of drivers and workers.

The fire has not caused any structural damage to the Princes Freeway pavement and as such, the freeway is not expected to be closed. Information on updated road closures is available via 13 11 70 or the VicRoads website: <http://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

Victoria Police

People who commit bushfire arson are not always strangers, they often live and work in local communities. If you have concerns about a member of your family, a friend or colleague, they might need help.

Victoria Police and Crime Stoppers urge the community to report suspicious behaviour by calling Triple Zero (000) or Crime Stoppers confidentially on 1800 333 000.

Livestock

If you have any concerns about the health of your livestock, consult a vet or the Department of Environment and Primary Industries Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Private Water Tanks

General advice from the Department of Health is that if your tank water supply tastes, looks or smells unusual do not use it for drinking, bathing or for pets. Contact your local council Environmental Health Officer or the Department of Health for additional advice.

Support

Nurse-on-Call on 1300 60 60 24 (this is a phone service that allows you to discuss any health related issue with a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria).

The Department of Human Services offer a range of support services including personal, emotional,

psychological and financial help. For information go to <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au>

EPA Victoria

More information on the impacts of smoke on local air quality contact EPA Victoria on 1300 372 842 (24 hours) or visit: www.epa.vic.gov.au

Department of Health

More information on the health effects of smoke, or on the use of water from rainwater tanks contact 1300 761 874 (during business hours) or go to:

www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/bushfires.htm

Asthma Foundation

For further information about asthma go to the Asthma Foundation of Victoria website at: www.asthma.org.au or call 1800 278 462.

Local Government

Latrobe City Council can be contacted on 1300 367 700 or go to: <http://www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/Home>

Stay Informed

For information on fires in Victoria and general fire safety advice, please contact the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) on Freecall 1800 240 667. (Callers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication impairment can call via 1800 555 677.)

Other valuable information sources include: ABC Local Radio, Commercial and designated community radio stations, the FireReady app and the VicEmergency website: www.emergency.vic.gov.au

Social Media

Facebook ([facebook.com/cfavic](https://www.facebook.com/cfavic))

Twitter (Twitter @ CFA_Updates)

Ongoing Fire Management and Information

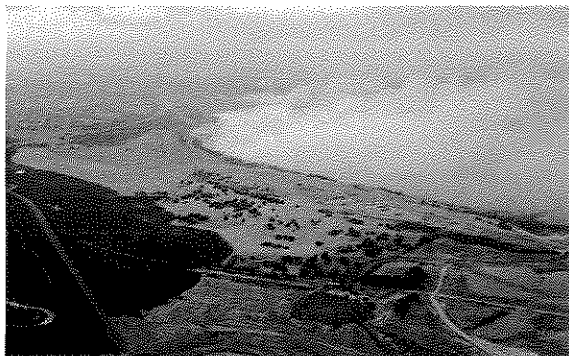
Fire agencies will maintain a heightened level of emergency response capability to cater for the possibility of any new fire starts in the Latrobe Valley area.

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The Firefighting Effort

Fire agencies and mine personnel are working around the clock on fire suppression activities at both mines.



Hazelwood Open Cut Mine Fire

The firefight at Hazelwood open cut mine involves around 200 CFA and MFB firefighters, 100 mine staff, 30 incident management team personnel and nine medical monitoring personnel.

They are supported by approximately 80 tankers, heavy pumping vehicles, ladder vehicles and aircraft.

Dependent on weather, firefighting tactics can include helicopter water bombing to reduce the heat on the coalface and support suppression activities.

Unmanned spray systems are being put in place to reduce the use of firefighters on the coal face.

While progress has been made to extinguish the fire, there is still at least several weeks of work ahead.

Yallourn Open Cut Mine Fire

Fire suppression activities will be increased in Yallourn to continue to extinguish spot fires throughout the disused section of the mine.

This may include helicopter water bombing, dependent on the weather conditions.

Air Quality and Health

Monitoring of carbon monoxide is being undertaken continuously both at the mine site and in the Morwell community by Emergency Services HazMat technicians.

The EPA also has air monitoring in place for fine particles in Traralgon and in Morwell to measure the impacts of the smoke (from bushfires and from the mine fires) on local air quality.

Emergency services and the EPA will continue monitoring over coming weeks to minimise any risks to communities or firefighters.

The level of carbon monoxide in and around the mines can increase - as occurred recently in parts of Morwell - when there are calm weather conditions and no winds to disperse smoke.

Based on weather conditions, it is possible that this will happen again until the fire is out.

How smoke affects you depends on your age, pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or heart disease, and the length of time you are exposed.

Children, the elderly, smokers and people with pre-existing illnesses such as heart or lung conditions (including asthma) are more sensitive to the effects of breathing in fine particles. Signs of smoke irritation include itchy eyes, sore throat, runny nose and coughing. Symptoms may worsen and include wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing.

It is very important that people with pre-existing health conditions take their medication, follow their treatment plan, and seek immediate medical advice if symptoms occur or call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24.



OHS for Firefighters

Some firefighters are required to wear breathing apparatus while fighting the mine fires, due to the risk posed to them by carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide levels are regularly checked by the use of air quality monitors, and this information is recorded every 15 minutes.

Firefighters and mine staff are required to leave the mine every two hours for a break.

Firefighters and mine staff returning from work are required to go through a Health Observation Station for

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assessment and clearance prior to entering or leaving the mine.

Crews are not able to leave the site until health monitoring has been completed and this is maintained under a 'no health tag, no exit' policy.

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Ongoing Fire Management and Information

Emergency services will remain alert for any new fire starts in the Latrobe Valley area.

Community officers will also be working in the field as conducting engagement with residents and vulnerable community members.