

UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

TO THE

HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

Subsequent to the lodging of its previous Submission, the UFU became aware of the statement of the firefighter employed by the MFB and presently identified by senior counsel assisting the Inquiry as firefighter L. As the statement of firefighter L and the letter of 6 June 2014 from the UFU to counsel assisting raises further issues additional to those which have been identified in the UFU Submission and already canvassed by the Inquiry, the UFU makes these Supplementary Submissions.

1. CARBON MONOXIDE LEVELS IN MORWELL

1.1 Statement of firefighter L

Firefighter L states that he was directed to go into Morwell for carbon monoxide (“CO”) monitoring.

He states that he was initially working with the Time Weighted Average (TWA) of 30 ppm as a trigger point for initiating warning to the community as this is the industry standard and/or Safe Work Australia standard for CO safe levels.

He states that soon afterwards the EPA and the Health Department got involved and the trigger point was changed to 70 ppm before we can initiate a warning to the community. Firefighter L believes that Commander O'Connell and CFA Scientist Warren Glover questioned this limit with Health Department officials and the police as it exceeded what fire fighters were required to wear BA in yet the Health Department were happy for the

public to be exposed to those levels.

Firefighter L states that on a separate occasion the Hazmat technicians, in a Hazmat debrief, were told not to discuss any limits or information what they were actually measuring, when they were in the township of Morwell. They were told not to give any recommendations or not to be in that environment or whether to leave or not.

When the levels got dangerous he states that they advised the public that perhaps it was not the best environment for them to be in and if they were able to seek alternative accommodation.

1.2 Issues arising in relation to CO levels in Morwell

It appears that someone or some entity gave instructions to change the trigger point at which the level of CO was high enough to warrant a warning to the public and advice about the consequences of such levels. By doing so it appears that the public and firefighters may have been exposed to levels of CO far above those normally regarded as safe and hence may have been exposed to danger to health and well-being. It appears that this was despite advice of the MFB and CFA. The UFU submits that the Inquiry should investigate this, and if it occurred as described by firefighter L, what was the explanation for it. The UFU submits that the trigger point for unsafe levels of CO should be clearly understood and be based on the customary standards. If this is not what occurred, the UFU submits the Inquiry should address this in its recommendations to ensure it does occur and protects the public from dangerous exposure to unsafe elevated CO levels.

The UFU is concerned that vital information on CO levels prior to 19 February has not been presented to the Inquiry. We understand that HAZMAT technicians warned of high levels of CO exposure of the public in Morwell. The UFU is reliably informed that CO readings from AreaRAE were collected and recorded and were available to the MFB, CFA, EPA and Department of Health.

The UFU also understands that the MFB sent an email to senior officers at Morwell asking for any areas of operational improvement to be given to Emergency Control Centre

and/or Operational Improvement.

UFU submits it would be of particular interest to the Inquiry if the MFB could be required to supply emails from HAZMAT technicians and other MFB officers which highlighted any operational concerns.

The UFU submits that there needs to be a process whereby firefighters can express their concerns about operational matters without censorship.

We note that the MFB, CFA, Department of Health and EPA should be able to inform the Inquiry about these matters and would be expected to have relevant documentation, as well as employees and/or consultants with direct knowledge about this.

2. TESTING FOR PM 2.5 and PM 10

2.1 Statement of firefighter L

The EPA was testing for particulate matter PM 2.5 and PM 10 and those results were not disclosed to the Hazmat technicians working in that area. This placed those fire fighters at risk in terms of Particulate Matter exposure.

2.2 Issues regarding PM 2.5 and PM 10

UFU submits that the Inquiry should investigate and determine whether the EPA (or indeed others) were testing for PM 2.5 and PM 10, whether any testing revealed dangerous levels of such particles, and if so why firefighters and/or the MFB and CFA were not informed, and the explanation for that. The UFU submits that it would be alarming and a cause for remedial and preventative recommendations by the Inquiry if this were the case, notwithstanding any explanation.

Again, we note that the MFB, CFA, Department of Health and EPA should be able to inform the Inquiry about these matters and would be expected to have relevant documentation, as well as employees and/or consultants with direct knowledge about this.

3. DECONTAMINATION

3.1 Statement of firefighter L

In the first 6 days of deployment the PPC of firefighter L and his colleagues was not decontaminated or taken away daily to be cleaned as these procedures had not been put in place at that time and they merely got into our hire cars and their contaminated clothing was taken back to the local accommodation at the University, into a supposedly clean environment.

3.2 Issues regarding decontamination

The UFU submits the Inquiry should investigate and determine whether there was any delay in applying, or failure to apply, appropriate and safe procedures for decontamination of PPC, and if this occurred the reasons for it. Again if it occurred as appears, the UFU submits it would be appropriate for the Inquiry to make remedial or preventative recommendations.