

# Community Information Newsletter

## Latrobe Valley Open Cut Mine Fires

6:00PM

Friday 14th February 2014

### The Firefighting Effort

There are two fires not yet under control in the Latrobe Valley at the Hazelwood and Yallourn open cut mines.

The primary focus of these two fires is the safety of firefighters and the community, community information, protection of energy assets and extinguishing the fires.

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

### Mill Fire at Maryvale

The fire at the Australian Paper mill is contained. It no longer poses a threat to communities and is being monitored by local brigades.

### Hazelwood Open Cut Mine Fire:

Fire services and mine management have made progress on reducing fire activity in the Hazelwood open cut mine.

The fire continues to burn along three levels of batter and is estimated to be three kilometres long.

Alongside mine personnel, more than 170 CFA and MFB firefighters are using a broad range of equipment including aerial appliances (ladder trucks), helicopters, and water cannons.

They are being supported by a range of agencies including Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, SES, OHS, EPA and The Red Cross.

Fire suppression efforts are focussed on areas of the mine that will minimise down-wind smoke effects for communities and firefighters, taking into account wind forecasts for coming days.

While progress is being made to contain the fire, there is still at least several weeks of work ahead.

The longer term plan is for a spray system to be put in place so firefighters do not have to be in the mine fighting the fire.

The fire is burning in non-working sections of the mine and the mine is fully operational.

### Yallourn Open Cut Mine Fire

The fire is burning in non-working sections of the Yallourn open cut mine and is estimated to be 2.5 kilometres long.

A SkyCrane is being used to suppress 30 hectares of fire on the mine floor.

### Air Quality and Health

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

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 to the smoke.

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.

Carbon monoxide is not expected to be of health concern for people away from the actual coal fires (i.e. outside the boundary of the mines).

As a precaution, the fire agencies are also doing carbon monoxide monitoring around the perimeter of the mine (i.e. outside the boundary) and the EPA are also using hand-held monitors to check carbon monoxide levels in the Morwell township. This monitoring has not detected carbon monoxide at levels of health concern.

### OHS for Firefighters

Firefighters at the scene are required to wear air quality monitors and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) while fighting the fire, due to the risk posed to them by carbon monoxide released by the mine fires.

A medical division has been established under a State Health Plan developed for priority health management of personnel.

Crews returning from work are required to go through a Health Observation Station for assessment and clearance.

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### 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.