

Community Information Newsletter no 3

Latrobe Valley Open Cut Mine Fires

February 18 2014 1630hrs

The Firefighting Effort

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

Safety of firefighters and community members is the most important consideration in this incident.

It is a complex fire situation that will go on for some weeks. As these types of fires often take a long time to put out, there will be increased smoke for some time which will affect people in different ways.

The emergency services are focused on extinguishing the fires and Department of Health and EPA will work together to monitor the smoke and provide information to the community.

Hazelwood Open Cut Mine Fire

The fire fight at Hazelwood open cut involves over 200 fire fighters, 100 mine staff, 30 incident management team personnel, and nine medical monitoring personnel. They are supported by numerous tankers, heavy pumping vehicles, other vehicles including eight large aerial ladder vehicles and aircraft.

Dependent on weather, fire fighting tactics will include helicopter water bombing to reduce the heat on the coalface and support suppression activities. Unmanned spray systems are in place to reduce the use of fire fighters on the coal face.

Light winds are expected in coming days but will peak at around 20 to 25 km/h on Thursday. While there has been some improvement in air quality today, there will continue to be smoke haze in the valley for some time.

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

Air quality is being monitored by EPA, emergency services and Hazmat technicians. Both fine

particles and carbon monoxide are being measured as indicators of the impacts of smoke on local air quality.

The levels of smoke in and around the Valley are highly variable, depending on the weather conditions. Impacts can be most severe in the Morwell area when there are light south-westerly winds or no winds to disperse smoke.

Monitoring will continue over coming weeks to minimise any risks to communities or firefighters.

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.

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 continue 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.

Information on updated road closures is available via 13 11 70 or the VicRoads website: <http://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

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Victoria Police

Victoria Police and Crime Stoppers urge the community to report any 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 (@CFA_Updates)

Community Information also available at the following locations:

On Wednesday February 19:

Morwell Neighbourhood House at 3.00pm

On Thursday February 20:

Traralgon shopping centre from 9.00am till 10.00am

Cowwarr General Store from 12.00pm till 1.00pm

Toongabbie Mechanics Institute at 5.30pm

Churchill Fire Station at 6.00pm

Glengarry Community Hall at 7.30pm