

Community Information Newsletter No 5

Latrobe Valley Open Cut Mine Fires

February 2014

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.

Hazelwood Open Cut Mine Fire

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

Observational reports from ground and aircraft has indicated that significant progress has been made. Firefighters continue to plan for the containment and suppression including the management of smoke of the fire by utilising expertise from local, state and national sources throughout all agencies. Community safety remains a prime consideration in the planning of the suppression of this fire.

Yallourn Open Cut Mine Fire

The management of the Yallourn mine fire is expected to be handed back to local control, but will continue to be supported by Victorian Emergency Services.

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. Data is being collected at Morwell East and is now being updated hourly on their website.

Local air quality is currently being affected by smoke and ash from burning brown coal. The primary health concerns are respiratory irritation, skin contact or irritation to the eyes.

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.

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.

The levels of smoke in and around the Valley are highly variable, depending on the weather conditions.

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/>

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>

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EPA Victoria

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

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)

The Health Assessment Centre

A Community Health Assessment Centre is open at the Ambulance Victoria Gippsland Regional office, 2 Saskia Way, Morwell adjacent to the Mid-Valley Shopping Centre.

Staffed by two nurses and two paramedics. The centre will offer basic primary health assessments such as blood pressure, heart rate, temperature and basic respiratory checks such as chest sounds and respiratory rate.

The service will operate from 8.00am to 8.00pm every day. Should anyone need medical care, they will be referred to their own doctor or to Latrobe Regional Hospital.

People visiting the centre will also be provided with current health and other community information about the health impacts of the mine fire.

The Community Respite Centre

The Victorian Department of Human Services has opened a community respite centre at Moe Town Hall, Albert Street, from 9:00am to 7:00pm. Residents can seek temporary respite from the smoky conditions in the cool air conditioned space.

Representatives from a number of organisations and current information on the fire situation – including health and environmental fact sheets will be present.

The centre's opening times may vary, depending on the demand. Residents are urged to contact the Department of Human Services Traralgon office (during business hours) for the most current information on (03) 5177 2500.

Community Information

A static information point (bus) outside of Coles, Morwell on Elgin Street, between Tarwin St and Chapel St, 9:00am-5:00pm

A number of information points have also been established, for times and locations of these daily information points please contact the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) on 1800 240 667 or Latrobe City Council on 1300 376 700.