



## Community Information Newsletter Number 12 Hazelwood Mine Fire

### HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE UPDATE

Fire fighters made good progress in the mine overnight with crews successfully closing out a number of hot spots in the mine. The fire remains controlled with long-arm excavators being used to dig out and extinguish hot spots. This suppression strategy has proven to be effective and visible smoke has been reduced.

Crews commenced works on 20<sup>th</sup> March to remove a corner of clay capping to investigate a hot spot in the northern batters known as the 'Old Faithful'. This fire is not related to the February 9 blaze which spotted into the mine. Old Faithful is an old fire scar the mine's personnel monitor on a regular basis. Some burning coal near Old Faithful was found to be smouldering coal that had rolled into a crack and is being dealt with by the mine. Since the significant progress made in suppressing the fire the northern part of the mine which includes the Old Faithful has been handed over to the mine management.

### FIREYS FLYING VISIT TO MORWELL KIDS

Hundreds of primary school children from Morwell had the opportunity to meet the firefighters working at the Hazelwood mine fire on Thursday 13 March.



Three water-bombing aircraft landed at Ronald Reserve, and were met by more than 700 students from St Vincent's Primary School, Tobruk Street Primary School, Morwell Primary School, and Morwell Park Primary School. Fire trucks from Traralgon CFA and Fire and Rescue NSW were also present for the kids to observe. Commercial Rd Primary School and Sacred Heart Primary School will be attending a similar event on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> March.

### HEALTH ADVICE MESSAGE

The advice message issued from the Department of Health and CFA is current for: Churchill, Driffield, Hazelwood, Hazelwood North, Morwell, Morwell North, Newborough, Traralgon, Yallourn, Yallourn North, Hazelwood South, Maryvale, Hernes Oak, Moe, Morwell Bridge, Yallourn Heights.

Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester, has lifted the advice for temporary relocation of vulnerable people living in the southern parts of Morwell, so residents including people aged over 65, children under 5, pregnant women and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition, can now return to their homes and workplaces.

Even though the fire is now controlled and the advice of temporary relocation has been lifted, there will potentially be smoke and ash in the local area for a number of weeks. As a result, the Department of Health will continue to be advised by the Environment Protection Authority of its continuing air quality data.

### HEALTH INFORMATION

It's not expected that exposure as a result of this fire will have long term health effects.

Stay aware of changing conditions via the [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au) or by calling 1300 372 842 (1300 EPAVIC).

There may be a risk of low levels of smoke for limited periods. In the event of a low level smoke advisory, the elderly, children and those with existing heart and lung conditions should limit time outdoors and limit prolonged or heavy physical activity.

Cleaning up ash and debris after fires can irritate the skin, eyes and throat. This effect will pass quickly. Follow the tips in the fact sheet "*Cleaning up after the Hazelwood open cut mine fire*" via the Department of Health website. Information about cleaning workplaces can be obtained from the fliers entitled as "Cleaning workplaces affected by the Hazelwood coal mine fire" distributed by "WorkSafe Victoria" that can be obtained from Latrobe City Council and recovery center.

EPA will continue to test local soil and water in partnership with the state's water catchment management authorities and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) to detect any changes to soil and water quality if they occur.

## **COMMUNITY INFORMATION**

Moe Town Hall respite centre is now **CLOSED** as a result of the temporary relocation advice being lifted.

Community Information and Recovery Centre will be open from 9am – 5:30pm daily and is located at 22 Hazelwood Road, Morwell.

Community Health Assessment Centre, Ambulance Victoria Gippsland Regional Office, 2 Saskia Way in Morwell, is open from 10am – 6pm until it closes on 30 March.

With improved air quality and the lifting of the health advisory in Morwell, the Minister for Public Transport has advised that the offer of free return travel is no longer available. More than 13,500 free return trips with V/Line have been taken by Morwell residents.

Scouts Victoria is offering free temporary accommodation at popular campsites across Victoria until **end of March**. Call **03 5128 5616**.

A holiday house scheme has been put in place to provide accommodation support. If you would like to offer your holiday house or use the accommodation on offer, please call **1300 366 356** to register your details.

If you are leaving Morwell overnight, or for a longer period, you can register your details with the Red Cross **Register.Find.Unite** service to help you let family, friends or neighbours know where you have gone. Visit [www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au) or call 1800 727 077.

## **BUSINESSES**

Eligible businesses in Morwell indirectly affected by a loss of income as a result of the mine fire will be able to apply for new \$100,000 concessional loans under the jointly funded

Commonwealth and Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA). Contact the Rural Finance Corporation on 1800 260 425 or online at [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au)

Grants are available for businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Call the Victorian Business Line on 13 22 15 or visit [www.business.vic.gov.au](http://www.business.vic.gov.au)

Business mentoring is available through Latrobe City Council on 1300 367 700.

## **VICROADS - PRINCES FREEWAY**

VicRoads has equipment installed in the freeway near the Hazelwood open cut mine which continually monitors the condition of the freeway for any movement every day and all year round. The system is continually monitored remotely and hasn't recorded any movement in the last few weeks.

Visual inspections are also being undertaken twice weekly and confirmed that there has been no indications of movement of the Princes Freeway.

Clearing of vegetation and trees will commence on the Princes Freeway between Strzelecki Hwy and Hernes Oak. Road work speed limits will be in place whilst vegetation and trees are cleared.

## **EDUCATION**

Following advice from the Department of Health that vulnerable people, including children, who temporarily relocated from Morwell can return. Planning has commenced for the re-opening of schools and early childhood services that temporarily relocated to locations outside of Morwell. All facilities will be cleaned before children return.

Commercial Road Primary School and Sacred Heart Primary School will remain closed until at least Friday 21 March with students and staff continuing to be temporarily relocated to schools in Moe and Newborough. All other Morwell schools remain open. Families who temporarily enrolled their child at a government school elsewhere in Victoria, or are doing home-based school work, should now begin planning to return to school normally.

Early childhood services that relocated will advise families when their facilities will re-open in Morwell.

A current list of school and early learning centre closures are available at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/closures.aspx>



## **FACT FILE**

- ❖ Approximately **500** people per day were directly working on the incident.
- ❖ More than **1,000** carbon monoxide tests on emergency services people are done each day.
- ❖ A total of **411,264,000** litres of water have been pumped around the mine so far. That is around **84,000** litres per minute. None of this water has been discharged from the mine.
- ❖ Over **300** accommodation bookings each day have been made in Morwell, Traralgon, Moe and Sale.
- ❖ EPA monitors the air in Latrobe Valley **24** hours a day, seven days a week, **365** days a year.
- ❖ EPA's monitoring program will continue for at least **12** months and will be one of the most comprehensive in the world, using cutting edge technology.
- ❖ Over **22,324** engagements with community by all agencies have taken place since 17 February, including door knocks, street walks, visits to shopping centres, RSLs, bowls clubs, primary schools and patrolling trains to help answer questions and listen to concerns from the public.



