

20/2/14

# Latrobe Valley coal mine fires – rainwater tanks

health

Community information

February 2014

This information has been developed by the Department of Health in response to community questions and concerns about ash fall-out from smoke from the current brown coal fires in the Latrobe Valley.

Local air quality in the Latrobe Valley is currently being impacted by smoke and ash from the burning brown coal.

If you live in a smoke-affected area you should be aware that your water tank could become contaminated from ash. If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual do not drink it or give it to animals.

The town drinking water supply is safe.

### How can I prevent my water tank from becoming contaminated?

The most effective way to prevent contamination of your water tank is to ensure that your tank is properly sealed and that you disconnect the down pipes while your house is affected by smoke and ash.

### What if it rains before I can disconnect the down pipes?

- Water testing is not necessary as contamination is usually obvious. If your water has changed in taste, colour or smell, then it should not be used for drinking or food preparation.
- Water that is not suitable for drinking can still be used on the garden.

If you use your tank water for drinking it should be disinfected before drinking.

Water can be disinfected by bringing the water to a rolling boil, or using chlorine (bleach).

### To disinfect your tank water with chlorine

For every 1,000 litres of water in your tank you can safely add:

- approximately 125 mL or 125 g of 4% chlorine household bleach, or
- approximately 40 mL or 40 g of 12.5% chlorine liquid swimming pool or dairy factory chlorine, or
- approximately 8 mL or 8 g\* of 65% granular 'swimming pool' chlorine.

After chlorinating, you should wait at least 24 hours before using the water to allow for microorganisms to be destroyed.

Avoid using household bleaches that contain detergents or other chemicals such as perfumes.

\*Note that 1 teaspoon is approximately 5 grams.

### When can I start using my rainwater tank again for drinking water purposes?

If the water in your tank has not been contaminated the water should be safe to use. However, do not reconnect your down pipes until your roof has been cleaned.

- If the water tastes, smells, or looks unusual you should use an alternate supply for drinking.
- You should only clean the ash from your roof and gutters when it is safe to do so.
- It should not be necessary to clean your tank after a fire, unless it is grossly polluted. If you wish to clean your tank it is recommended you engage a specialist contractor, as working in a confined space is dangerous.

### For further information

Local water cartage or tank cleaners - contact the Environmental Health section of Latrobe City Council on 1300 367 700.

Authorised by the Victorian Government, Melbourne.