

Community information



Air quality

Part of EPA's role is to monitor air quality in Victoria. There are 13 fixed air monitoring stations that capture data in Melbourne, Geelong and the Latrobe Valley.

24 FEBRUARY 2014

EPA Victoria, 200 Victoria Street, Carlton

Where is EPA monitoring in the Latrobe Valley?

There is a fixed air monitoring station located in Traralgon and EPA has set up two additional stations in Morwell and Morwell east, as well as additional monitoring equipment in the area, in response to air quality impacts from the Hazelwood open cut mine fire.

Additionally, EPA staff have mobile monitors to collect information on ash and carbon monoxide at various locations throughout Morwell.

What is being measured?

The key measurements EPA is taking as part of the Hazelwood open cut mine fire response are of fine particles (known as PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) that are in the air from the fire, and carbon monoxide. However, air stations also measure other parameters.

Carbon monoxide monitoring is being undertaken continuously both at the mine site and in the Morwell community by emergency services hazmat (hazardous material) technicians. There is currently no carbon monoxide or heavy metals in the smoke but we, along with the hazmat teams, continue to monitor this around the clock.

What is Carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas. It is made when carbon compounds - in this case, coal - burn and there is not enough oxygen. It can be harmful to humans. Personal CO testing is now available at medical centres in Morwell.

What is the difference between PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀?

PM_{2.5} refers to fine particles (0.0025mm) that are the result of burning or combustion of material - in this case, coal. They are also the primary health risk.

PM₁₀ are larger (0.01mm) in size and are found in road dust and in the burning and combustion of material - again in this case, coal.

How do you know you are testing in the right locations?

The monitoring locations have been chosen to ensure they're in the right place to capture the overall air quality in the area, as well as the very worst level particles. This allows us to inform the Department of Health and emergency response services in Morwell.

When will air quality improve?

While progress has been made to extinguish the fire at the Hazelwood open cut mine, there is still potentially weeks of work ahead, with a large emergency response contingency in place dedicated to this fire.

The air quality in Morwell and Traralgon is very dependent on weather conditions. Air quality is generally better when wind is blowing smoke away from the mine and if there has been rainfall. During days when the air is clear we encourage you to open your home and air it out. The best time to do this is often the very early hours of the morning.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Department of Health:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer/2014-02-latrobe-valley-smoke.htm>
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/bushfires.htm>

CFA:

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/>

Nurse on call:

Call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24

What can I do to protect myself?

Excessive smoke levels can not only aggravate existing heart or lung conditions, but may also cause irritated eyes, coughing or wheezing.

Anyone with a heart or lung condition should take their medication as prescribed by their doctor, while people with asthma should follow their asthma management plan.

Air Quality

Where can I get information about air monitoring?

EPA has dedicated pages on our website directly related to Morwell and Traralgon air quality. Updates are provided hourly.

If you don't have access to the web, information will be available at the following places:

An information bus stationed at Morwell Bowling Club

Located at 52 Hazelwood Road, Morwell.

Moe Respite Centre

This is at Moe Town Hall, Albert Street, Moe, open from 9 am - 7 pm daily. The opening and closing times may vary, depending on the demand, so residents are urged to contact the Department of Human Services' Traralgon office on 03 5177 2500 (during business hours) for the most current information.

What are the impacts from ash?

The main health concern from ash is irritation to eyes, nose and throat. The particles are too large to be breathed deeply into the lungs.

Is the smoke toxic?

All smoke, including bushfire smoke, can be harmful to your health.

Further investigation into some of the more harmful substances in smoke is being undertaken, but there is currently no reason to expect the smoke from the Hazelwood open cut mine to be significantly different from smoke from other coal sources.

If you are concerned about your health you should seek medical advice or call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24 or visit a medical centre.

Are there poisonous substances (in addition to CO) such as heavy metals in the smoke and the ash?

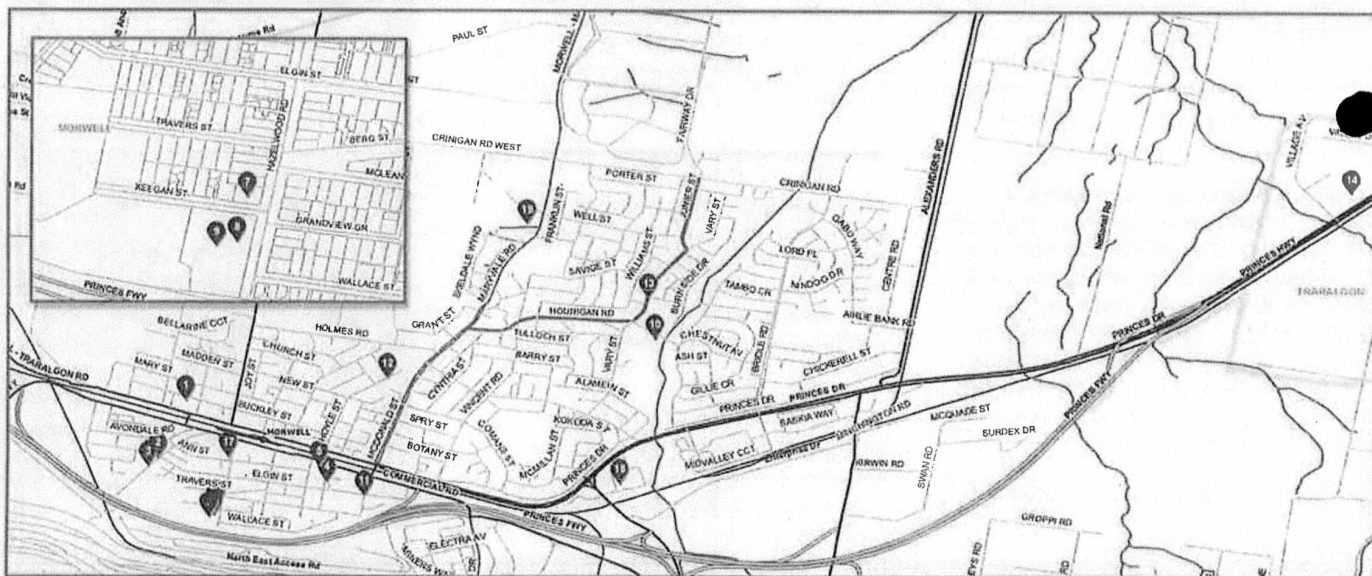
Victoria has brown coal which contains oxides including calcium, aluminium, potassium, sodium, iron and magnesium. Reported analyses of brown coal does not indicate the presence of heavy metals such as mercury, arsenic and lead. Ash has the potential to act as a mild skin, eye or throat irritant. Local samples of the ash are being analysed by EPA.

What is EPA doing to support the community?

EPA now has several air monitoring stations fanned across the Latrobe Valley giving us an increasingly broad view and predictive ability of the air quality.

Hourly air quality updates are available on our website. EPA officers are at the respite centre and several other locations around Morwell offering information to you on air quality monitoring.

Where air is being monitoring in Morwell and Traralgon



Mapping locations represent monitoring as of the 21 February, locations are subject to change. Data from sites 9 and 10 is available via EPA's website. All other stations are collecting and monitoring air quality data for scientific analysis.