

Hazelwood open cut mine fire

health

Health update for the community

30 April 2014

The purpose of this update is to provide the latest information and advice on health-related matters following the recent fire at the Hazelwood open cut mine that caused smoke and ash to impact on Morwell and nearby communities.

Air quality

Information on current air quality in the Latrobe Valley is available on the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) website at

www.epa.vic.gov.au

The Department of Health continues to provide health advice on air quality samples collected by EPA during the mine fire. The most recent report published by the Department of Health on 22 April, relates to air samples collected between 5 March and 3 April 2014.

The results show that all substances from this round of testing were at safe levels. To view the full report, select 'Air quality tests' from the left hand navigation at

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood/>

Long-term health effects

Long term health effects from air pollution usually occur after several years or a lifetime of exposure.

The smoke from the Hazelwood open cut mine fire has affected local air quality for a number of weeks, rather than years, therefore long-term health effects are not expected, however, a study will be undertaken to ensure that health effects, if any, are identified.

Long-term health effects study

The department plans to initiate a substantial and extended study into the potential long-term health impacts of the Hazelwood open cut mine fire. This study will be carried out by an independent research organisation and will seek to measure the impact, if any, of the mine fire on heart and lung disease,

malignant disease (cancers), mental health outcomes and the birth weight of newborn babies.

It is anticipated that researchers will engage and consult with the community in and around Morwell regarding different aspects of the study.

Public consultation sessions regarding the study will be held in Morwell on Tuesday 6 May. Information about these sessions and the opportunity to contribute online are available at

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood/>

What do I do if I am still concerned about my health?

If you are worried about your health, call NURSE-ON-CALL on **1300 60 60 24** or see your doctor.

Anyone who is finding it hard to breathe or has chest pain should call 000 immediately.

Ash in roof cavities

Should I remove ash or dust from my home's roof cavity / ceiling space?

Some ash from the mine fire may have settled in your roof cavity.

It is not necessary to clean the dust or ash out of your roof cavity to protect you or your family's health. The ash is non-hazardous and similar to that found in a typical fireplace.

If you climb into the ceiling space or bring the ceiling down during a major renovation you will be exposed to dust and ash.

If you have a pre-existing lung condition such as asthma you should avoid exposure to dust and ash. If you must enter the roof space or another dusty area, wear a facemask to minimise any irritation.

Heaters and cooling devices

What do I do if I suspect there is ash in my heating / cooling appliance?

Check and follow the manufacturer's instructions before cleaning heating and cooling devices or components such as air-conditioners, solar panels, ducted heating or evaporative cooling systems. This equipment may need to be professionally serviced.

Energy Safe Victoria advises that gas heaters should be serviced every two years and that ageing or faulty electrical appliances should never be used. For more information visit

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

Tank water

If your home is connected to the mains water supply ('town water') use this water for drinking. The area likely to have been affected by ash in water tanks (the southern part of Morwell) is connected to the mains water supply.

The fact sheet regarding rain tank water has recently been updated and is available at

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood/rainwater-tanks.htm>

Food from the garden

Can I eat fruit and vegetables from my garden?

Wash herbs, fruit and vegetables from your garden before you eat them. Ash should not affect your garden.

Water and soil quality

The mains water supply to Morwell and surrounds remains safe and unaffected by ash or smoke.

The EPA is also monitoring soil and water quality in the area. No health concerns have been identified in recent testing. For details go to the EPA website:

<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/air-quality-latrobe-valley-mine-fire>

Further health information

For more information about health issues go to: www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood

For information about asthma go to the Asthma Foundation of Victoria's website at www.asthma.org.au or call 1800 278 462.

What support is available locally?

Community Information and Recovery Centre

The Community Information and Recovery Centre at 22 Hazelwood Road Morwell is a one stop recovery shop open daily between 9am and 5:30pm with clean-up info, HEPA grade filter vacuum cleaners on loan and other cleaning products. Go to the Department of Human Services recovery site for more information – www.recovery.vic.gov.au.

Latrobe City Council

For information and assistance contact Latrobe City Council on 1800 017 777.

Please note, as air quality has returned to normal the Community Health Assessment Centre in Morwell and the Respite Centre at Moe are no longer operational.

Authorised by the Victorian Government, Melbourne.
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