

Mine fires FAQs 18/2/14

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CFA Media

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The following Frequently Asked Questions will help answer community queries about the Hazelwood mine fire.

1. I live in or near Morwell, will I get sick?

- 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 to the smoke.
- Signs of smoke irritation include itchy eyes, sore throat, runny nose and coughing. Healthy adults usually find that after a short exposure to smoke these symptoms clear up once they are away from the smoke.
- Children, the elderly, pregnant women smokers and people with pre-existing illnesses such as heart or lung conditions (including asthma) are more sensitive to the effects of breathing in fine particles. Symptoms may worsen and include wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing.
- 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 persist.

2. On days of very poor air quality, should I send my children to school?

- Please talk to your school regarding any particular health concerns for your children
- Please visit www.education.vic.gov.au for the latest information.

3. If air quality is bad, what should I do?

- During extended, very smoky conditions, sensitive individuals should consider temporarily staying with a friend or relative living outside the smoke-affected area
- Avoid physical activity outdoors (exercise allows more fine particles to be breathed deeper into the lungs). People with pre-existing lung or heart conditions in particular, should rest as much as possible and keep away from the smoke.

- Anyone with a heart or lung condition should follow the treatment plan advised by their doctor and keep at least five days supply of medication on hand. People with asthma should follow their personal asthma plan.
- When at home, stay indoors with all windows and doors closed. If you operate an air conditioner during smoky conditions, switch it to 'recycle' or 'recirculate' to reduce smoke coming inside your home.
- If your home gets too hot to be comfortable, or is smoky, try to take an air-conditioned break at a local community library or shopping centre.
- If there is a break in smoky conditions, take the opportunity to air out your home to improve indoor air quality.

4. I have asthma, what should I do?

- Exposure to fine particles can aggravate existing heart or lung conditions, including asthma.
- People with asthma should follow their personal asthma plan.
- For further information about asthma go to the Asthma Foundation of Victoria website at: www.asthma.org.au or call 1800 278 462.

5. What are the cumulative effects of carbon monoxide?

- All smoke including bushfire smoke can be harmful for your health. Department of Health advice on bushfire smoke can be found here. <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/air/bushfires-and-air-quality>
- Department of Health advice can be found here. <http://health.vic.gov.au/environment/bushfires-smoke.htm>
- If you or anyone in your care is experiencing symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure, seek medical advice or call NURSEON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24.
- For further information about asthma go to the Asthma Foundation of Victoria's website at: www.asthma.org.au or call 1800 278 462
- Anyone experiencing difficulty breathing or chest pain should seek urgent medical assistance – phone 000.

6. Where is EPA monitoring air quality?

- EPA has a permanent monitoring station in Traralgon and has set up 2 monitoring stations in Morwell this week at Morwell Ronald Reserve and at the Bowls Club, Traralgon in Kay St

7. How much carbon monoxide (CO) is safe?

- Typically CO is safe at levels of less than 1 part per million (ppm).

- Standards for CO relate to exposure over a period of time.
- The national air quality standard is 9 ppm for an average of 8 hours.

8. Why isn't EPA measuring anything else in the smoke?

- All smoke is bad for your health
- Smoke contains a myriad of compounds
- Measuring the amount of particles in the smoke is the best way of determining whether the smoke will affect you
- You can do an assessment yourself without fancy monitoring equipment by seeing how far you can see. If you can see 20 km the air quality is good. If you can only see 10 km it is poor.

9. How long will it take to put the fire out?

- While some progress has been made to contain the fire, there is still at least several weeks of work ahead.
- Extinguishing fires in coal mines is difficult and takes a sustained effort. Fires have been extinguished in Hazelwood coal mine before and they can be extinguished again.

10. How do we stay informed about the firefight?

- Fire services, agencies and the government are working together to keeping the Latrobe Valley and the wider Gippsland community informed about the open cut mine fires by providing timely, tailored and relevant information about the fires.
- CFA Community Safety Officers and health representatives will be available in Morwell and surrounding communities to keep residents informed about the fires.
- The CFA mobile information unit will visit multiple locations within Morwell and CFA Community Officers will also be working in the field today to engagement with residents and vulnerable community members in Morwell.
- Further community information meetings are also being planned.
- You can keep up to date with the FireReady app or visit the VicEmergency website www.emergency.vic.gov.au