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Latrobe City addresses community concerns over mine fire response

Latrobe City Council has moved to allay community concerns about its perceived lack of response to the current mine fire.

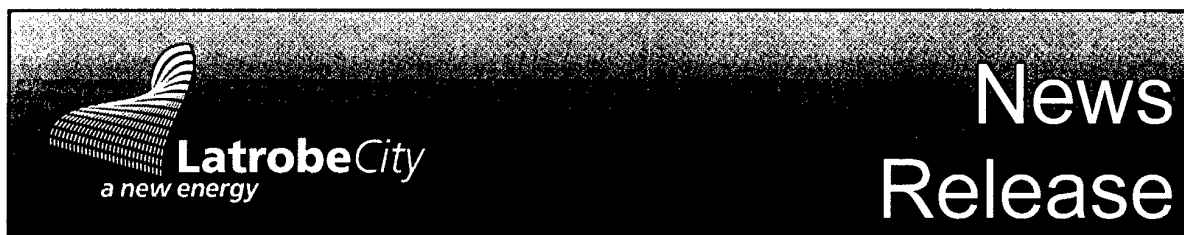
Latrobe City Council's mayor, Councillor Sharon Gibson, said she understood the anger in the community.

"We are responding, and we have been since day one. When an incident such as a bushfire occurs, Council is represented on the Incident Control Centre from the set up. However, we are a support agency and not the lead agency. This may be where the community has a misconception about communications.

"In terms of action, we opened two relief centres, one in Moe and one in Traralgon which were attended by 600 people. We worked with other agencies to run these centres including Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches and Victoria Police as well as a multitude of volunteers from the community and Council staff. We provided overnight accommodation for more than 300 people and provided meals for those staying at our relief centres.

"Council also has a major role to play in recovery and unfortunately, due to other fires, we are very experienced in this area. Our officers visited 47 impacted properties to assess damage and identified 35 families requiring on-going support. Some of the tangible ways in which we help these families is to provide landfill passes to assist in the clean-up, provide potable water, assess and remove dangerous trees, refer to other agencies or services, provide safety equipment such as hard hats and gloves.

"We have also started planning for a volunteer farm fencing replacement program and have provided community newsletters to property owners," Cr Gibson said.



“There are numerous other ways in which Council goes about its recovery business and in this particular fire emergency, which is on-going and complex, we have undertaken a variety of extraordinary services. These include increased street sweeping in the Morwell CBD, providing a child friendly space in the respite centre, visiting home and community care services to provide health related information and dust masks, relocating a Morwell preschool service to Moe and arranging transport for the families.

“We have responded to community requests for face masks by providing these directly to our home and community care residents and by having them available on the front desk in HQ, the Morwell library and Latrobe Leisure Morwell.

“Council requested meetings with Craig Lapsley, fire services commissioner, Dr Rosemary Lester, chief health officer and John Merritt, chief executive officer of the EPA. One of the outcomes of this meeting has been the request for a further 5000 masks to be made available to cater for anybody who hasn't been able to get one,” Cr Gibson said.

“Of course, we are monitoring the situation and receiving all the latest information from the agencies involved. Our concerns are with our community and rest assured we are addressing each issue as it arises,” Cr Gibson concluded.

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