

Incident Control Centre Hazelwood

24/02/14

Hazelwood open cut mine fires - update

Fire progress: Fire activity at the Hazelwood open cut mine fire has more than halved compared to the 11th February, Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said today.

He said thermal imaging line scans of the mine show the progress made over the past 11 days. The scans can be viewed on CFA's website and social media channels and are also being used by emergency service and agency community workers when talking with locals.

"This reduction in fire activity doesn't happen by chance and I want to recognise the good work of our firefighters and support staff as they have worked extremely hard in testing conditions," Mr Lapsley said.

"It's great to be able to show these line scans to firefighters and support staff so they can see that their hard work is paying off. It also demonstrates to the local community that we are making progress.

"Fighting this fire is very weather dependant and, at times, the wind can hamper our efforts but overall, we're making good progress."

Mr Lapsley said while there has been success in some areas of the mine, the remaining parts of the fire will be challenging to extinguish and there are still weeks of fire fighting ahead.

Tomorrow there is a chance of thunderstorms with lightning and a south-westerly wind change expected around 5.00pm. Due to this change in weather, emergency services have bolstered their standby capability for the day.

Equipment and tactics: A greater focus is currently being placed on the northern batters of the mine fire (which are closest to town) and should help reduce smoke levels.

To assist, two long-bucket Sikorsky helitaks are being used to aerial bomb the eastern end of the northern batter which is extremely hot. Once cooled, equipment and systems will be put in place to help with the fight. These helitaks replace the aircranes and have benefits such as being able to fill up on-site.

Foam: Two compressed air foam units from the ACT start work in the mine today. They join a Tasmanian crew who has already in place for the past four days.

The compressed air foam will be used on the northern batters to smother the fire and, importantly, help reduce the amount of smoke affecting Morwell.

The foam is used as a thick layer to blanket the fire, helping to cool it and suppress the smoke. Firefighters were already using 'Class A' foam, which continues to be used, and brought in the compressed air foam units as soon as a trial showed it worked on a coal fire.

People concerned about the fire and their health should can visit one of the information points available or refer to the below sources.

Information points:

- In a new approach to engage with the community, four community liaison people travelled on the V-line train between Traralgon and Pakenham between 6.00am-9.00am today. This afternoon they will travel between Traralgon and Garfield from 4.00pm-7.00pm.
- Anyone needing a break from the conditions can visit the Moe Town Hall respite centre, Albert Street, 9.00am-7.00pm.
- CFA information bus will be outside the Coles car park in Elgin street, Morwell today from 2:30-6.00pm.
- A Community Health Assessment Centre is located at the Ambulance Victoria Gippsland Regional Office, 2 Saskia Way in Morwell, next to the Mid-Valley Shopping Centre, 8.00am-8.00pm. Two nurses and two paramedics can offer basic health assessments, such as blood pressure, heart rate, temperature and basic respiratory checks such as chest sounds and respiratory rate. Anyone needing medical care will be referred to their own doctor or to Latrobe Regional Hospital.
- Emergency services and other agency workers will also be doorknocking and walking around areas of most concern in Morwell to provide residents with information.

Information sources

- www.health.vic.gov.au (for smoke and health)
- NURSE-ON-CALL 1800 60 60 24 (for health)
- www.epa.vic.gov.au or 1300 372 842 or 1300 EPAVIC (for air quality)
- www.emergency.vic.gov.au (for fire information, warnings and advice)
- cfa.vic.gov.au and the Victorian Bushfire Information Line 1800 247 667 (for general information)
- National Relay Service 1800 555 677 (for callers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication impairment: general situation)

For more information: Traralgon Incident Control Centre media - 5177 3286