

Incident Control Centre Hazelwood

Media release

Friday, 28 February 2014

Update on Hazelwood mine fire

The fire at Hazelwood open cut mine has now been burning for almost four weeks.

Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said while good progress had been made and the fire area in the open cut coal mine had been halved since February 11, the fire would run for at least another two weeks and maybe longer.

"If we get the expected warm and windy weather conditions next week, it will affect our ability to make further gains on this fire," he said.

"In the first two weeks we had greater than 50 percent suppression and in the third week suppression has also been good, but the fire escaped earlier this week and we lost ground."

"We still are focused on getting the fire out within the next two weeks, however that is the best case scenario and the forecast weather next week will challenge that."

Overall a positive result was achieved yesterday and overnight, with preparation for a wind change. Crews remain focused on preventing spread of the fire in the coal batters and continue to monitor all critical infrastructure.

"Night times are proving to be good fire suppression weather and plans are in place to increase crew numbers for these shifts," Mr Lapsley said.

"Our firefighters are doing a great job in difficult and filthy circumstances, facing the challenges of carbon monoxide and the continual monitoring of that, the pumping of water out to allow water in, the constant monitoring of stability of the site and the overarching safety of all firefighters."

Monitoring the health of firefighters is a constant process that has been modified and updated to suit circumstances as the fire situation changes and the open cut mine continues to burn and produce fine ash.

"This ash in conjunction with the smoke is what the community sees, feels and is ultimately frustrated with and distressed by," Mr Lapsley said.

Fire agencies continue to work with and take advice from EPA and the Chief Health Officer to understand the impact of the ash and smoke on the community and firefighters and to provide that information to the community.

"Though efforts are focused on reducing the smoke as well as the fire activity, the fire will continue to throw up considerable smoke over the Morwell community.

"We're very aware of the frustration and distress the extended smoke is causing for Morwell residents."

Continues...



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The Victorian Department of Human Services and the Latrobe City Council are opening a Community Information and Recovery Centre today in Morwell.

The centre will be open from 9.00am to 6.00pm daily and is located at 22 Hazelwood Road Morwell, offering support and information from:

- Latrobe City Council
- Department of Human Services
- Red Cross
- Victorian Council of Churches
- Other key agencies

Depending on your circumstances, you could also be eligible for further support, including some financial assistance from the Victorian Government to help you get away from the smoke for a while. Find out more by calling the Department of Human Services on **1800 006 468**, and make an appointment to discuss your needs.

The Red Cross **Register.Find.Reunite**.service is also running to help you let family and friends know where you are, if you take a break away from Morwell.

If you plan to leave Morwell overnight, or for a longer period, please consider registering online at www.redcross.org.au or by ringing 1800 727 077.

The Moe Town Hall is still open from 9.00am till 6.00pm daily, and offers a relaxed air-conditioned space to have a cuppa and take a break from the smoke.

The CFA Information bus will be outside the Coles car park in Elgin Street Morwell from 10.00am till 5.00pm today. It will be at the Mid-Valley shopping complex from 10.00am till 5.00pm tomorrow (and not at Elgin Street - please note the change).

Over 200 people have been attending the Community Health Assessment Centre at the Regional Ambulance Victoria, Saskia Way, Morwell every day for health checks and information and staff numbers there have been increased to cope with the demand.

Over 7000 people in Morwell and Traralgon have been spoken to in the past 10 days and given information about the fire situation and about health and the environmental impacts of the fire.