

Incident Control Centre Hazelwood

Media release

Monday, 3 March 2014

Hazelwood open cut mine fire - update

Water Strategy

Two 500mm diameter, 4.7 kilometre long pipes are currently being constructed inside the mine to assist with the removal of water. This will assist with maintaining stability in the mine and allowing increased water capacity for fire fighting if required.

Incident Controller, Bob Barry, said that being able to remove more water from the mine floor means more water can be pumped onto the burning coal. It also keeps the mine floor in better condition for fire fighters to operate.

"The piping is being connected to four large pumps – including two new pumps just brought into the mine – and will be operational Wednesday evening," he said.

"Currently we are pumping up to 84,000 litres of water every minute from the mine's cooling ponds and other sources onto the fire and these new pumps and pipes will allow us to increase that which should be an improvement in this fire fight.

"We need to manage all the water being poured onto the fire and make sure it's removed from the mine floor. These pumps will not only help us keep a balance, they allow us to get the upper hand by removing water faster from the mine which lets us get more water onto the fire."

Tactics and strategy

At least two strike teams have been brought in ahead of difficult conditions tomorrow.

"We have had very good success over the past few days and fire activity in the mine has significantly reduced," Mr Barry said.

"Tuesday could be challenging so the additional strike teams will be there to stop fires that escape from the mine – as occurred last week - so we don't have to divert resources from within the mine."

The strategy being successfully used along the coal batters is that an aviation fire tender that carries 9,000lt of water and uses an on-board nozzle (which penetrates the coal), drives through and cools an area, then Compressed Air Foam (CAF) units and aerial trucks apply foam to soak into the fire for a few hours before crews using thermal imaging cameras extinguish remaining hotspots. To further support this strategy an extra seven high capacity (4,000lt) tankers have been requested.

"We won't hand this fire back to the mine until it no longer presents a threat. We are confident we will put this fire out," he said.

Health checks

The CFA Health Support Team (HST), supported by local health professionals is currently undertaking an average of 1600 health checks a day at the Hazelwood power station staging area.



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State Coordinator HST, Peter Langridge said the team is working round the clock to measure the levels of carbon monoxide in the blood of mine workers, emergency services personnel and visitors to the staging area.

"The process takes less than a minute and involves a simple test using a Masimo CO-oximeter, which is placed around a finger and gives a percentage reading almost instantly," Mr Langridge said.

"We've seen an average of four people every 24 hour period with slightly elevated levels of between five and seven per cent and one to two per day with medium elevated levels.

"Anyone who has a reading of more than eight per cent is assessed by a paramedic and either released to go home and not return for 48 hours, or, if they're showing any other symptoms, they're referred to the Latrobe Regional Hospital. This is a quick and efficient method of constantly monitoring personnel who are spending time in or near the mine in the current conditions."

Community information

Temporary relocation away from smoke is recommended for people aged over 65, pre-school aged children (under 5, including babies and infants), pregnant women and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition living or working in Morwell South, south of the railway line.

Advice and support regarding temporary relocation is available through Department of Human Services on **1800 006 468** or visit: www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Morwell residents seeking respite from the smoke are being offered free train travel with V/Line. 18 return train services between Morwell and Melbourne each weekday will be free of charge.

The Moe Town Hall respite centre is open on Albert Street from 9.00am till 7.00pm and offers a relaxed air conditioned space to have a cuppa and take a break from the smoke.

The Community Health Assessment Centre is open from 8am till 8pm at the Ambulance Victoria Gippsland Regional Office, 2 Saskia Way in Morwell, next to the Mid-Valley Shopping Centre.

The Community Information and Recovery Centre at 22 Hazelwood Rd, Morwell will be open from 9.00am till 6.00pm daily. The centre offers support and information from council, DHS, Red Cross, CFA, Victorian Council of Churches and other key agencies.

CFA information buses will be in various locations between the Mid-Valley shopping centre and Hazelwood South over the next few days.

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)

-ENDS-

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