

## Incident Control Centre Hazelwood

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# MEDIA RELEASE

12 March 2014

### Hazelwood open cut mine fire - update

**Fire:** The Hazelwood open cut mine fire remains controlled but there is still a lot of work to do before it can be declared safe and control handed back to the mine, Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said today.

“As with any fire, we really depend on favourable weather conditions to make good progress and overnight some strong winds and rain slightly hampered firefighting efforts,” he said.

“There are still a number of hot spots within the mine and the rain wasn’t enough to reduce any heat in the fire, instead it made conditions slippery and muddy on the ground which can cause some access issues for trucks, particularly the larger aerial appliances.

“But we didn’t lose any ground and we are confident that the fire will remain controlled with our strategies in place to deal with some further very high fire danger forecast this Saturday.”

Mr Lapsley said on Saturday the Latrobe Valley was expected to experience temperatures in the mid-30s with strengthening northerly winds. A cool change is then forecast to move through bringing with it a chance of thunderstorms and rain.

“While we are experiencing some very variable weather conditions in the valley at the moment, we’re also well prepared to deal with this and in a good position now the fire is controlled,” he said.

“A number of our tactics continue to be effective including the use of foam and water and in addition to trucks and aircraft, there is significant earthmoving works being undertaken by cranes, dozers and excavators in an effort to reduce hot spots in the mine.

“Hand-held Thermal Imaging cameras are also helping to locate remaining hot spots which are then being marked with fluro paint by ground observers for follow up treatment.

“Bringing this incident to a close relies on the expertise of many different organisations and agencies, as well as various personnel from firefighters, to aviation officers, fire behaviour analysts, health monitors, community liaison officers and the entire Incident Management Team who helps ensure things run smoothly on and off the fire ground. It has been a huge team effort.”

**Air Quality:** EPA Victoria has issued a high level smoke alert for the Latrobe Valley today (Wednesday) as a result of the Hazelwood open cut mine fire.

A high level alert means that it is likely residents will see ongoing smoke impacts today, with visibility less than 10 kilometres due to high particle concentrations in the air.

The Victorian Chief Health Officer Dr Rosemary Lester has advised vulnerable groups living or working in the southern part of Morwell to consider temporary relocation because of the Hazelwood mine fire.



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"As a sensible precaution the best way for vulnerable people in the southern part of Morwell to avoid the continuing smoke and manage their health would be to temporarily relocate," Dr Lester said.

"Anyone with a heart or lung condition should take their medication as prescribed by their doctor.

"People with asthma should follow their asthma management plan.

"Everyone should keep informed about fire activity in their immediate area. Anyone with concerns about their health should seek medical advice or call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24.

"People in these more vulnerable groups should call 1800 006 468 to seek advice and make arrangements for temporary relocation."

**Health:** Victoria's Chief Health Officer Dr Rosemary Lester said although the mine fire has now been controlled, the current health advice remains in place.

"People over 65, children under school age, pregnant women and those with pre-existing heart or lung conditions living or working in southern Morwell are advised to consider relocating," she said.

"We are hopeful that in coming days we will be able to review this advice."

Assistance and information about the clean-up of homes and business premises will be made available through the Department of Human Services and the City of Latrobe.

The details of this aspect of the recovery process for Morwell will be announced by the DHS and the council in the near future.

**Information:**

- **Smoke and health:** [www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)
- **Emergency relief and recovery:** [www.recovery.vic.gov.au](http://www.recovery.vic.gov.au)
- **Health and medical advice:** NURSE-ON-CALL 1300 60 60 24
- **Air quality:** [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au) or 1300 372 842 (1300 EPAVIC)
- **Fire warnings and advice:** [www.emergency.vic.gov.au](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au)
- **Hazelwood fire information:** [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)