

Incident Control Centre Hazelwood

MEDIA RELEASE

17 March 2014

Hazelwood open cut mine fire - update

Health: Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester, today lifted the advice for temporary relocation of vulnerable groups in the southern parts of Morwell, saying they can now plan to return to their homes and workplaces.

"The Fire Services Commissioner has advised me the fire in the Hazelwood open cut mine is now controlled," Dr Lester said.

"The crucial factor is that air quality, particularly the PM 2.5 level, has improved significantly."

"This now means people over 65, pre-school aged children, pregnant women and those with pre-existing heart or lung conditions can progressively return to their home or their place of work in the southern parts of Morwell.

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

Dr Lester said the health of the people of Morwell is her first priority.

"The Department of Health will continue to be advised by the Environment Protection Authority of its continuing air quality data. We will also be advised of any change in the fire behaviour," she said.

Dr Lester confirmed the Community Health Assessment Centre will continue to operate until the end of the month.

"It has been an important service and provided residents with reassurance about their health through health checks and advice from ambulance paramedics and nurses," she said.

Fire fight: Incident Controller John Haynes today confirmed that weekend rain had taken heat out of the mine floor but made it more difficult for firefighters to reach hot spots in the batters.

"The wetter weather provided some relief but also presented new challenges and work was mostly halted in the mine while it rained on Saturday afternoon and night," he said.

"The fire remains controlled and over the past few days we have kept making good progress on the hot spots by ripping up the coal and dousing it with water.

"This is a slow process and will most likely continue for a few more weeks – weather permitting - but the fire isn't throwing up much smoke and the remaining hot spots are being dealt with quickly."

Mr Haynes thanked all involved in what has been a massive and long-running (36 days) operation.



Media contact: Traralgon Incident Control Centre media unit - 5177 3286