

Incident Control Centre Hazelwood

MEDIA RELEASE

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Hazelwood open cut mine fire – update 21/03

The northern batters of the Hazelwood open cut mine fire are now 'safe' after 40 days of intensive firefighting, Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said this morning.

The northern batters are the area closest to Morwell and one of the most fire intense areas that put smoke and ash over the town for many weeks.

"This is excellent progress and has been achieved by firefighters working 24 hours a days for over five weeks to finally secure the northern batters. This has been a critical fire area, as it caused the most concern to the community," Mr Lapsley said.

With the status of the northern batters moved to 'safe', the one and a half kilometre-section of the open cut mine has been officially handed back to GDF SUEZ and will now be managed by the mine.

"It's a significant milestone for our crews who have been working tirelessly over the past five weeks to make this site safe," Mr Lapsley said.

"Only a few weeks ago, the northern batters were significantly impacted by fire. We've now got it to a point where there are only a small number of isolated hot spots remaining which can be effectively managed by GDF SUEZ."

The southern batters, the mine floor and the knuckle will continue to be controlled by fire services until they are deemed safe, however, Mr Lapsley said the fire agencies anticipated it would only be a matter of days before this is considered safe.

"We will hand back parts of the mine, sector by sector, to GDF SUEZ as they become safe, which means they no longer pose any threat to the community or infrastructure, and can be effectively managed by the mine," Mr Lapsley said.

The area of the open cut mine that had a pre-existing fire in the batters, known as the 'Old Faithful', has also been handed back to GDF SUEZ. It is a 'fire scar' that has existed in the batters for many years and has been managed by being capped with clay.

"The mine staff and fire service personnel assessed the fire scar yesterday - no fire was detected and it did not issue any smoke so the area has been re-capped and will continue to be managed in that way," Mr Lapsley said.

As good progress with the fire continues and the demand for resources eases, a number of the water-bombing aircraft made a stop in Morwell to show primary school students what equipment the firefighters have been using at the mine.

Two firebirds and Sikorsky chopper being used in the Hazelwood open cut mine landed in Ronald Reserve in front of 350 cheering students.



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Mr Lapsley said the event was a chance for the relocated students from Sacred Heart and Commercial Road Primary School to learn about the aircraft, meet the firefighters and ask questions about the equipment being used on the mine fire.

'Many of the children are thanking firefighters for their efforts in bringing the mine fire under control but we also want to take this opportunity to thank the kids and the wider Morwell community for their support over the past five weeks,' he said.

The school visit is part of the fire services' community engagement program and is the second event of its kind in the past week.