



Coroners Court of Victoria

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22 July 2015

Monica Kelly
Health Lead
Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Secretariat
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

RE: Inquiries made to identify Victorian coronial cases where a link was alleged or established between the death and the 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire.

Dear Ms Kelly

In my letter to you dated 15 July 2015 and headed **Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Request for Documents**, I indicated I had made “appropriate inquiries” to identify deaths relevant to Prof John Catford’s request. In a subsequent telephone conversation, you indicated that you required further detail about the inquiries made. The purpose of this letter is to describe the method for your information.

Data source

I used the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) to identify cases of relevance in this request. The NCIS stores a range of information on deaths reported to Victorian coroners from 1 July 2000 to present, including text-searchable versions of the following coronial documents: the initial Victoria Police report of death to the coroner, autopsy report, toxicology report, and (for closed cases) coroner’s finding.

Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria I used to identify potentially relevant deaths were (a) the death was reported to the CCOV on or after 9 February 2014; and (b) the Hazelwood Mine Fire was mentioned in any way by those investigating the death including the coroner, forensic pathologist, forensic toxicologist and Victoria Police members.

Case identification

I used the NCIS Coroners’ Screen to search the text of the Victoria Police report of death to the coroner, autopsy report, toxicology report, and (for closed cases) coroner’s finding, for every death reported to the CCOV on or after 9 February 2014. The search terms I used were: “Hazelwood”, “Hazlewood”, “mine fire” and “coal fire”. Any death identified through any search was reviewed to determine whether it met the inclusion criteria.

Data collection

For any relevant death, I downloaded a copy of the document or documents where reference was made to the Hazelwood mine fire.

Limitations

When a death is reported to the CCOV, there is a delay before the forensic medical investigation is completed, then a further delay before the toxicology and pathology reports are prepared and uploaded to the NCIS. Consequently, relevant deaths linked to the Hazelwood Mine Fire may not have been identified because the material was not available on the NCIS to be searched.

The NCIS stores a subset of the documents and other evidence generated for a coronial investigation. Material including witness statements, the coronial brief prepared by the investigating Victoria Police member, expert reports and correspondence is not uploaded to the NCIS, and is not otherwise electronically searchable. There are possibly cases where this material contains mention of the Hazelwood Mine Fire, however the only way to identify these would be via a manual review of every coronial file from 9 February 2014 to the present (approximately 9,000 files). This task is beyond the resources of the CCOV.

Further information

For clarification regarding the contents of this letter please contact me at any time on my direct number 03 8688 0780 or via email: <jeremy.dwyer@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au>.

Sincerely



Jeremy Dwyer
Acting Manager Coroners Prevention Unit
Coroners Court of Victoria