

Hazelwood coal mine fire: Ash residue in Morwell roof cavities project

Community update No. 5 – November 2016

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has prepared the following information to provide an update on the 'Ash residue in Morwell roof cavities' project since October 2016.

About the project

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry recommended that the government collect and test any ash that may have settled in the roof cavities of houses in Morwell, publish the results of that analysis to the community and provide advice about any potential known or unknown health effects. (Recommendation 9, Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report III)

The 'Ash residue in Morwell roof cavities' project will address this recommendation and also allow government agencies to better understand the community's concerns about ash in roof cavities.

DHHS is leading the project, working closely with the community, Latrobe City Council and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria.

How can I be involved?

Community members can participate by registering to receive monthly project updates, asking questions and providing feedback, and by attending community meetings. We encourage everyone to stay involved with the project, even if your house was not selected for testing.

Complete or download a registration form to receive updates at: www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project

Email us at: ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Phone us on: 1300 761 874

How is the project going?

Thanks to everyone who volunteered to have samples taken from their roof cavity. All 50 samples from houses in Morwell were collected in September and October. These houses represent a range of house and roof types and locations in Morwell.

The department sent a letter to all participating households that were not selected by Senversa for testing. The letter contained advice about the selection process and included a summary of Senversa's sampling plan.

Senversa started collecting samples from houses in Rosedale (the control site) in November. We had initially expected to have all samples collected in October, but due to limited uptake from Rosedale households, the project timeline has shifted by approximately one month.

How were houses selected?

Houses were selected for testing based on Senversa's *Sampling and Analytical Quality Plan* (sampling plan).

The sampling plan explains how houses were selected for sampling and the efforts made to ensure that selected houses are representative of the range of homes in Morwell. This means that even if your house was not selected, a house of similar type to yours was likely to be included in the testing process, and the results of the testing will be relevant to you and your neighbours.

You can find a summary of the sampling plan on the project page at: www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project

Sampling in Rosedale

Senversa has selected Rosedale as a control site because:

- it is within the Latrobe Valley and is expected to have seen some effects from mining and power generation
- ash and/or smoke does not appear to have reached Rosedale during the Hazelwood coal mine fire (based on satellite photos of the smoke plume and air monitoring carried out by the Latrobe Valley Air Monitoring Network during the fire).

Community questions

Detailed information about the project and the answers to community questions are available in the updated Frequently asked questions (FAQs). You can find these online at:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/hazelwood/ash-project-faq>

A copy of the FAQs document was sent to everyone who registered to receive project updates in November.

Next steps

Testing the samples

Tests will be conducted to understand what is in the roof cavity samples and to determine whether any materials or chemicals found are at levels that could affect human health.

The results of the samples from Morwell houses will be compared with the samples from Rosedale houses. This will help us to understand whether the ash residue and/or other dust within roof cavities in Morwell is different from that found in similar houses, which were not impacted by the Hazelwood coal mine fire. This will also help us to understand whether the ash or dust samples from Morwell are likely to have come from the mine fire or from another source.

Advice to the community

Senversa are expected to provide preliminary results of the testing in December 2016.

Details of the composition of any dust or ash found in roof cavities will be communicated to the community. Advice will also be given about any possible health risks from the material found.

The preliminary results will be shared with key stakeholder groups and the community through these updates, the project webpage and community meetings. The preliminary results will also be published in a final project report, which is expected to be available by March 2017.

In line with Recommendation 9, the results will be provided to the Latrobe Health Assembly.

Community forums

Community forums to discuss the preliminary results will be held in January 2017.

We were initially planning to organise community forums in December, however we want as many people as possible to attend and therefore these will be scheduled after the busy Christmas and New Year holiday period.

The project team from Senversa will be at the forums to discuss the preliminary results of the testing along with project team members from the department.

Keep an eye out for the invitation in the mail, online and in the local paper in the New Year.

Advice to homeowners

If your house was tested, you will receive an individual report about the results of sampling in your house and the project team will personally visit you to discuss the results. This is expected to happen in February 2017.

All results will be combined to form the final project report, but your personal information will be confidential. Your name or address will not be published in the final project report or other publicly available documents related to the project.

Final project report

The final project report is expected to be available by March 2017.

A summary of the report will be sent to everyone who registered to receive updates. A request form for a copy of the full report will be included with this mail out.

The summary report will be available online and we will provide hard copies to local community groups and community hubs, such as the library, RSL, and council offices for people to collect.

The full report will be available online and hard copies will be available by request. Anyone can request a copy by:

- emailing ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au
- phoning 1300 761 874
- returning the request form included with the summary version.

Action plan

Senversa will provide advice to the Government about what was found in Morwell roof cavities.

If the analysis finds that there is ash residue in roof cavities that could be hazardous to health, or if the health impacts are unknown, Senversa, as the independent expert, will audit the extent of the community's potential exposure to the ash and develop an action plan to manage any risks.

The government will work with Senversa and the community to determine what actions may be required.

More information

Department of Health and Human Services

Community updates and resources will be published on a dedicated project page at:

www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project

Questions about the project can be directed to: ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au or 1300 761 874.

Stay up to date with social media:

- Twitter: @VicGovDHHS #MorwellAshProject
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/VicGovHealth

EPA Victoria

For more information about the EPA's environmental monitoring program in Morwell and surrounding areas call EPA on 1300 372 842 or visit

<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/hazelwood>

Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry

For more information on the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry visit www.hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au

Senversa

More information about Senversa is available at www.senversa.com.au

Project timeline

The following timeline provides relevant dates relating to the project. We will continue to update the timeline as the project progresses. Keep an eye out for monthly community updates.

February 2014	Hazelwood coal mine fire burned for at least 45 days until 10 March 2014
March 2014	Hazelwood Mine Fire Board of Inquiry established
May 2015	Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry reopened
February 2016	<i>Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report 2015/2016 Volume III – Health Improvement</i> (Inquiry Report III) tabled in the Parliament of Victoria. This report includes Recommendation 9, relating to the Ash residue in Morwell roof cavities project
April 2016	The Victorian Premier and Minister for Health announced that the Government had accepted all recommendations from Inquiry Report III, including the testing and analysis of ash residue in roof cavities, on 15 April 2016
May 2016	The 2016-17 Budget allocated funding to support the implementation of the recommendations in Inquiry Report III (including Recommendation 9)
June 2016	Planning was underway to implement the project, including the development of a dedicated website and generic email address to facilitate the recruitment of houses for testing, and engagement of an independent expert
July 2016	The procurement process to engage an independent expert closed on 22 July 2016
August 2016	The successful independent expert (Senversa) was engaged via a DHHS contract. Contracts are published on www.tenders.vic.gov.au
September 2016	Community forums were held in Morwell. Senversa (independent expert) developed the <i>Sampling and Analytical Quality Plan</i> that sets out how houses will be selected for testing. Sampling commenced during September 2016
October 2016	Senversa finished collecting samples from all of the 50 selected houses in Morwell
November 2016	Senversa will collect samples from Rosedale (control site). Samples will be tested and Senversa will analyse the results
December 2016	Senversa are expected to provide preliminary results of the testing in December 2016
January 2017	Community members will be invited to attend forums to discuss the preliminary results and possible next steps
February 2017	Senversa will visit people whose houses were tested and provide the individual reports
March 2017	The final project report is expected to be available by March 2017. This will be promoted to the community in a number of ways

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 761 874, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email environmental.healthunit@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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