

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

Community update No. 6 – December 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 November 2016. This update includes some information from the independent expert Senversa, including preliminary results of samples collected from houses in Morwell only.

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?

Senversa completed collecting samples from 50 houses in Morwell in September and 10 houses in Rosedale (the control site) in December.

What are the preliminary results?

Senversa (independent expert) has provided the department with preliminary results for the samples collected in Morwell only. The samples were tested for a number of chemicals, some of which may be seen in ash residue, some which may be seen in coal dust and some of which are commonly found in roof cavities elsewhere. The levels of chemicals in the samples were compared to recognised health-based levels.

- In a small number of houses, some chemicals (lead, antimony and zinc) were reported at levels above the health-based assessment criteria.
- The concentration of these chemicals are considered to be consistent with background sources of contamination rather than brown coal ash. For example, lead is commonly found in roof dust due to the petrol emissions of cars that previously used lead petrol.
- The zinc levels found in the roof samples is thought to be due to the corrosion and degradation of metal roof materials.
- We will have a better understanding about the likely source of these chemicals once the results of the Rosedale roof cavities are available.
- A particular chemical of concern in the analysis was Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), as these can commonly be associated with combustion or fire. PAHs were not reported above the adopted health-based assessment criteria at any of the Morwell properties tested.
- The results from the indoor surface testing of 50 houses in Morwell did not find any strong evidence of material from the roof cavities in the indoor dust.

It is important to note that because Rosedale results are currently unavailable, the results from Morwell houses have not been compared with the control site at this time. Once these results are available for comparison it will be easier to understand whether the material found in the Morwell roofs is likely to have come from the Hazelwood coal mine fire or another source.

Next steps

Advice to the community and stakeholders

These preliminary results are being shared with the community, key stakeholder groups and the Latrobe Health Assembly.

The results will also be published in a final project report, which is expected to be available by March 2017.

Community forums

Community forums to discuss these preliminary results will be held in late-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, as requested by several residents in the Morwell community.

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.

We will promote the forums by:

- publishing the invitation on the project webpage at www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project
- sending via email or mail (depending on previously stated preference) the invitation to registered participants
- posting information on social media
- providing the invitation to key stakeholder groups for them to promote
- advertising in the local paper.

Individual reports

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 after the community forums in late-January 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 assess the extent of the community's potential exposure to the ash and develop an action plan to manage any risks.

The government will consider Senversa's recommendations and work with the community to determine what actions may be necessary.

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.

The answers to community questions are available in the updated Frequently asked questions (FAQs) at:

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

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 developed the <i>Sampling and Analytical Quality Plan</i> that sets out how houses were selected for testing. Sampling began collecting samples in Morwell in late-September 2016
October 2016	Senversa finished collecting samples from all of the 50 selected houses in Morwell
November 2016	Senversa began collecting samples from Rosedale (control site) in late-November. Samples from Morwell were tested
December 2016	Senversa provided preliminary results of the testing. Sampling was completed in Rosedale and those samples will be tested. Senversa will analyse and compare the results
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

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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