

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

Community update No. 7 – January 2017

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 December 2016. This update includes some information from the independent expert Senversa, including what the results from samples collected from houses in Morwell and Rosedale are showing.

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 through community forums 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.

Can I still be involved?

While the project is drawing to a close, community members can still 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

Community questions

We collected questions from the community at the September 2016 forums, which were used to inform our frequently asked questions (FAQs). These will be updated to include some further questions we received from the January 2017 community forums.

Detailed questions and answers about the project are available in the FAQs online at:

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

In November, a copy of the FAQs was sent to everyone who had registered to receive project updates. If you would like a copy of the FAQs, email us at ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au or phone us on 1300 761 874. Alternatively you can download from the dedicated webpage www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project

How is the project going?

Senversa (the independent expert) completed the collection of samples from 50 houses in Morwell in September 2016 and 10 houses in Rosedale (the control site) in December 2016 for comparison.

A summary of results from the samples collected in Morwell were provided in the December community update (No. 6). Senversa has now provided results from the samples collected in Rosedale (see page 2). Summary results were provided in the December update because Senversa were still awaiting the results for Rosedale to enable a comparison to be made. This was important for understanding whether the material found in the Morwell roof cavities was likely to have come from the 2014 Hazelwood coal mine fire or from another source.

The department met with key stakeholder groups in Morwell in December to discuss the summary results.

We held four community forums in Morwell on 23 and 24 January to discuss the results from Morwell and Rosedale with the community. Thanks to everyone who attended and provided feedback.



Final results

What did Senversa test for?

Senversa tested the samples to see if the following chemicals were present and at what levels:

- 18 metals: antimony, arsenic, boron, barium, beryllium, cadmium, cobalt, chromium, copper, lead, manganese, mercury, nickel, selenium, strontium, titanium, vanadium and zinc
- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

Refer to Senversa's sampling plan for more information on why these chemicals were selected and how the sampling was done. This is available on the project webpage at: www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project

Analysing the results – what did they show?

- No ash residue from the Hazelwood coal mine fire was found in roof cavities in Rosedale but it was found in roof cavities in Morwell.
- There were three metals (lead, zinc and antimony) that exceeded Health Investigation Levels in some properties in both Morwell and Rosedale. A Health Investigation Level is a level above which further investigation may be needed to determine whether a significant health risk exists and does not mean that there are potential health risks.
- For the three metals, the concentrations appear to be associated with sources other than brown coal ash from the Hazelwood coal mine fire, that is:

- Lead: high concentrations in older homes can be attributed to lead-based paint and/or petrol emissions of cars that up until 2002 used leaded petrol
 - Zinc: high concentrations in metal-roofed properties are likely to be due to the corrosion and degradation of metal roof materials
 - Antimony: higher concentrations were found in homes with foil insulation, which can contain antimony.
- Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) were not detected at levels of concern in any of the Morwell properties tested.
 - The results show that being exposed to the brown coal ash residue that may be present in some roof cavities is unlikely to affect health.
 - However, the presence of any dust in roof cavities may cause respiratory effects (such as coughing, sneezing or irritation to the eyes, throat and nasal passage) if the dust is disturbed and inhaled. In addition, roof dust may also contain other hazardous materials or chemicals that should be avoided, for example asbestos if there are asbestos containing materials present.
 - The department has information for householders about hazards in roof cavities and steps to take to protect your health.

- See our *Hazards in Roof Cavities – Information for Householders* fact sheet, available at: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/environmental-health-in-the-home/hazards-in-roof-cavities>

Next steps

Individual reports

If you are the owner of a house that 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. Senversa will contact you personally if samples were collected from your house.

The first meetings began on 23 January 2017 after the first day of community forums and is expected to continue throughout February 2017.

All results will be combined to inform the final project report, but your personal information will remain 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. Senversa will provide recommendations to the government about what was found in the roof cavities of Morwell and Rosedale.

Community members provided feedback at the September community forums about how the final report should be published and promoted. We have used your suggestions to inform our publication plan as follows:

- 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. The report will be published on Australian recycled paper. 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.

The government will consider Senversa's recommendations and communicate its response to the report to the community.

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

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 for Morwell only. Sampling was completed in Rosedale and those samples were tested. Senversa analysed and compared the results.
January 2017	Community forums were held in Morwell to discuss the final results and possible next steps. Senversa started visiting people whose houses were tested to discuss the results.
February 2017	Senversa will continue to visit people whose houses were tested to discuss the results from their house 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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