

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

Community update No. 3 – September 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 August 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.

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 will the project be done?

An independent expert will collect and test the dust contained in 50 roof cavities in Morwell, and undertake a detailed analysis of the composition of that dust. This analysis will then be communicated to the community. Advice will then be provided to the community regarding any known or unknown risks to health. Another 10 roof cavities in another area in the Gippsland region unaffected by the mine fire will also be tested for comparison.

If the analysis finds that ash residue in roof cavities could be hazardous to health, or if the health impacts are unknown, 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.

Who is the independent expert?

The procurement process to engage an independent expert closed on 22 July 2016.

The environmental consultancy Senversa was appointed as the independent expert in August 2016. Senversa employs environmental health scientists specialising in environmental health and risk assessment.

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

Senversa will:

- set out how the testing will be done
- contract an occupational hygienist to collect and analyse ash samples
- provide independent expert advice to the community and DHHS
- prepare a high-quality report that:
 - shows the results of the occupational hygienist's sampling and analysis
 - assesses any health risks of ash in the roof cavity
 - recommends next steps.

How can I be involved?

Community members can participate by registering to receive monthly project updates, asking questions and providing feedback by email

ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au or by phoning **1300 761 874**, and by attending community meetings.

To receive updates:

- complete the online registration form at: www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project
- download a registration form from www.health.vic.gov.au/ash-project

Can I still volunteer my house for testing?

Registrations to volunteer a house for testing closed on Monday 15 August and a strong response was received from the community. As such no further registrations are needed. It may not be possible to offer testing to all who expressed interest, but DHHS will endeavour to keep everyone informed about the results of the project.

Next steps

Community forums

Three community forums were held in Morwell in September. Questions and feedback from the community will help to inform the sampling plan, next steps, and future community updates.

Selecting houses for testing

Senversa will develop a sampling plan that sets out which houses will be tested and why. A summary of the sampling plan will be published and shared with the community.

You will be contacted by Senversa at the end of September 2016 if your house has been selected for testing.

While it may not be possible to offer testing to all who expressed interest, DHHS will endeavour to keep everyone informed about the results. That will include contacting those who have not been selected, as well as providing information to the wider community about the sampling plan.

Taking samples from roof cavities

If your house has been selected for testing, you will be contacted to arrange a time to collect the sample.

A screening questionnaire will be used to ensure the safety of sampling staff. It will take between 45 minutes to one hour to collect the samples and you will need to be home during this time.

Sampling and testing

Samples will be tested to understand what is in the ash and to determine whether any materials or chemicals that may be found are at levels that could affect human health. The results of the samples from houses in Morwell will be compared with the samples from the unaffected area. Details of the composition of the ash will be made available to the community. Senversa will

also provide advice to the Government about what was found in people's roof cavities.

Advice to homeowners and the community about the results

If your house was tested, you will be personally visited by the project team to give you the results and to talk with you about them.

The results will also be shared with the wider community through these updates, the project webpage and community meetings, and will be published in a final report.

All personal information will be confidential. Your name or address will not be published in the report or other documents related to the project.

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

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 3) 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 3, 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 3 (including Recommendation 9)
June 2016	Planning 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) will develop the selection criteria determining how the testing of houses will be done. Testing will commence during September 2016

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