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# Hazelwood open cut mine fire

Health update for the community

17 March 2014

Air quality in Morwell has improved and the fire is controlled.

The Chief Health Officer has lifted the temporary relocation advice to at risk groups living and working in southern parts of Morwell.

## Can I return home now?

Recovery planning is already well underway and will be co-ordinated through Latrobe City Council with assistance from numerous state departments and agencies.

## Can I start cleaning up my home?

The general answer is yes. Children, older adults, pregnant women, smokers and people with pre-existing heart or lung conditions (including asthma) are more sensitive to the effects of breathing in fine particles so it's best to get help to clean and avoid the ash.

It also makes sense to keep children out of the ash.

## Is it safe to clean up the ash?

### Cleaning up

- Sweeping or vacuuming can stir up dust and make air-quality inside your home worse. When cleaning up ash, gently sweep and use a wet mop to clean floors.
- Avoid vacuuming unless you have a HEPA filter vacuum cleaner.
- Wash soft furnishing and clothes according to cleaning instructions
- Wash herbs, fruit and vegetables from your garden before you eat them. Ash should not affect your garden.

- If your tank water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not use it for drinking or bathing for yourself or for your pets. The town drinking water supply is safe.

**See the 'Cleaning up after the Fire' factsheet and the 'Rainwater tank' fact sheet for more information and cleaning tips at [www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood)**

## What about a facemask?

- Face masks (called 'P2 masks') can help to filter out fine particles in smoke but they must be fitted and worn properly which is difficult for children. Keep them out of the ash as much as possible.

**See the Facemask Q & A and video on how to fit a facemask correctly at [www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood)**

## What if the smoke comes back?

While the fire in the Hazelwood mine is now controlled, it is not completely out. Smoke may sometimes be visible in the future, but it is not expected to be at the same levels experienced in the last few weeks. Monitoring will continue so check the EPA website for air quality updates at [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

## I'm still worried about my health

Ash can irritate the skin, eyes and throat but this effect will pass once the dust is gone.

Long term health effects from air pollution usually occur after several years or a lifetime of exposure.

The smoke from these fires has affected local air quality for a number of weeks, rather than years, therefore long-term health effects are not expected.

## Community Health Assessment Centre

If you want to talk to a nurse or ambulance paramedic about your health please visit the Community Health Assessment Centre at Ambulance Victoria Regional Office, near the Mid Valley Shopping Centre at 2 Saskia Way, Morwell. You do not need an appointment.

**Anyone who is finding it hard to breathe or has chest pain should call 000 immediately.**

If you are worried about your health, call NURSE-ON-CALL on **1300 60 60 24** or see your doctor.

## Further health information

⊗ For more information about health issues go to: [www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hazelwood)

Printed copies of these information sheets are also available at the Community Health Assessment Centre in Morwell:

- Ash fall-out
- Smoke and your health
- Face masks - Q&A
- Rainwater tanks
- Cleaning up coal ash and smoke in the house

⊗ For information about asthma go to the Asthma Foundation of Victoria's website at [www.asthma.org.au](http://www.asthma.org.au) or call 1800 278 462.

## What support is available locally?

For information and assistance contact Latrobe City Council on 1800 017 777 or contact the Department of Human Services – [www.recovery.vic.gov.au](http://www.recovery.vic.gov.au).

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