

EPA Media Release



Morwell air quality significantly improves but EPA monitoring to remain

Monday 10 March 2014

EPA Victoria's unprecedented air monitoring efforts in the Latrobe Valley indicate PM2.5 levels, the invisible particles which are the main health concern, are at their lowest levels since the Hazelwood coal mine fire started almost a month ago.

EPA CEO John Merritt revealed CO levels from the burning coal were significantly lower than previous weeks when a thick plume of smoke blanketed Morwell and neighbouring towns.

But, even with the likelihood of the fire being controlled, as advised by the CFA, Mr Merritt assured residents EPA's air quality monitoring efforts would continue for the foreseeable future.

"Our latest air quality monitoring data report for the entire Latrobe Valley region shows the overall levels of PM2.5 and CO have declined dramatically in recent days," he said.

"This is in large part due to the extraordinary efforts of Victorian and interstate firefighters.

"But even after the fire is out, smoke will linger. It is vital that we remain vigilant with our systematic air quality monitoring and reporting, to provide that data to the Department of Health to assess potential health impacts and advise the public accordingly.

"We have fixed and mobile monitoring devices measuring air quality 24 hours a day across the region. The monitoring locations have been specifically chosen to ensure they are in the right places to capture the overall air quality in the region, as well as the very worst particle levels.

"We'll continue to have a team in the Valley supporting the Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester, fire services and the community during the clean-up.

"And I want to assure residents and businesses based on the advice of our scientists, and in consultation with emergency services and the Department of Health, we will only scale back monitoring when appropriate, whilst some of the equipment being used to support operational fire fighting will be removed as we transition to recovery.

"And, as we have throughout this incident, we will remain transparent with residents and keep them fully informed of our plans."

For more information on the Hazelwood open cut mine fire:

- Smoke and health: www.health.vic.gov.au
- Health and medical advice: NURSE-ON-CALL 1800 60 60 24
- Air quality: www.epa.vic.gov.au or 1300 372 842 (1300 EPAVIC)
- Fire warnings and advice: www.emergency.vic.gov.au
- Hazelwood fire information: cfa.vic.gov.au

EPA media inquiry: 9695 2704

