

WITNESS STATEMENT OF RAY WHITTAKER

I, Ray Whittaker, [REDACTED], of Morwell, in that State of Victoria, state as follows:

Personal background

1. I currently reside at [REDACTED], Morwell.
2. I am currently retired, however previously worked for the State Electricity Commission (SECV) for approximately 30 years.
3. I receive an age pension.
4. I am also a member of Asbestos Council Victoria/ Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support Inc (ACV/GARDS).
5. I also have emphysema. I have been a smoker for almost all my life. I have tried to give up a few times with no luck. I don't know if I have asbestosis and I don't want to know. I have pleural plaque disease on my lungs. .
6. My wife passed away a while ago and I am not sure of the cause. A post mortem was performed which showed that she also had pleural plaque disease.
7. My eldest son has neurofibromatosis, epilepsy and short term memory loss. He is on a disability pension and lives with me in Morwell. My son does not work - I am my sons carer.
8. All my children are affected with neurofibromatosis. It is a genetic disease. My youngest son had to have growth hormones when he was younger.
9. My eldest daughter lives in Coffs Harbour and my youngest daughter lives in Morwell with her husband and four sons.

Employment History

10. I started my working life in 1963 at Yallourn as a trades' assistant with the boiler makers. I then worked for a period of time at the briquette factory at Yallourn before it closed.
11. Following this I was employed by Yallourn C&D Power stations as a rigger and a scaffolder.
12. I then got a job at the Morwell workshop. As a part of my job I was required to work with asbestos mats that were used as covers for hot wheels. The asbestos mats were stored in an area close to where we worked with a

galvanised fence around them. There was asbestos everywhere. I didn't know anything about asbestos at that time.

13. I then worked in the Hazelwood open cut mine and the power station for a short period. On 31 December 1992, I took a redundancy package and retired.
14. I then did a bit of travelling. When I returned I worked as a removalist for a period of time. It was very hard work. I did that for about nine months until it got to be too much.

My experience with the Hazelwood Mine Fire

15. I didn't receive any phone call or warning about the fire on 9 February 2014.
16. I also didn't receive much information during the fires. I have a mobile phone, but only know how to make and receive calls. I cannot use text messages. I do not use the internet.
17. I saw some information on the TV about the fire but there wasn't very much. My friend told me to listen to ABC radio which I did and that provided me with more information. I also got information about the fire from my friends in the community.
18. I had trouble breathing during the fires. Prior to the fires, I had never coughed so much and brought up so much phlegm. I had never used my ventolin so often..
19. I didn't receive any extra medical treatment during the fires, just my normal appointments. I knew why I was coughing more, it was because of the smoke. I did not need to go to a doctor to be told that.
20. I received \$500 as a relocation allowance. My son received nothing and we were given no explanation for this unequal treatment. We applied for the relocation money at the Senior Citizens Branch in Morwell, where we were interviewed by a lady from DHS.
21. The person at DHS who gave me the \$500 made me feel very guilty and ashamed about having the money. She did not believe me that my son was on a disability pension.
22. I relocated to Moe for one week after I received the relocation money. My disabled son and I went to stay with my youngest son and his partner in Moe. I could not leave my son at home by himself so I had to take him with me to Moe. We could only stay for one week as we didn't have enough money to

- stay longer. We spent the money on the travelling costs, extra petrol and contributing to the costs of running the household where we were staying.
23. I also went to the ACV/GARDS office in Newborough to get some relief from the smoke. I do not remember the exact dates but to the best of my recollection I called in to the office 5 or 6 times over several weeks.
 24. The Latrobe City Council provided me with limited support during the fires. What I did receive was useless. About one month after the fires had started, the Council provided me with a plastic bucket with a pair of gloves that were too big. I also received a couple of face masks and some vouchers. I did not get any information with the material about how to clean the ash properly or in a safe way. I thought it was a mickey mouse solution to look like they were doing something.
 25. I didn't receive any help from the Council to help clean my house after the fire. I did it all myself. I haven't yet got up into the roof space to clean in there and I don't feel that it is safe for me to do so.

RAY WHITTAKER