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**To:** [Hazelwood Info Shared Mailbox](#)  
**Subject:** Morwell Mine Fire Submission  
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Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Health

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## HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY 2.

Submission.

As indicated in my submission to the previous Mine Fire Inquiry I suffered severely from health and financial problems during and after the fires.

This is still the case.

My neurological disease which had for many years been stabilised pre-mine fire deteriorated during the fires and continues to decline, with symptoms exacerbated, new symptoms emerging and the return of symptoms previously not experienced for many years.

As well, I have had recurrent & ongoing health issues with hair loss, infections of sinuses, mouth, skin, lungs and over the past year and a half have been on almost constant antibiotics as well as months long courses of anti fungals & cortisone creams (for skin rashes when previous to the mine fire I had never experienced skin problems ever) While these medications help slow down the spread of the infections the drugs do not cure them.

The additional costs plus the second year's total crop failure in a row (never happened before Feb 2014) of my vegetable garden is a huge strain on my limited income.

My home was filled with smoke & thick fine ash during the fire. Despite my best efforts, because I am unable to move heavy furniture nor can find any help from agencies who do not provide such a cleaning service, the ash is still inside my house. Still on top of and behind bookcases, behind desk, fridge, oven, chests of drawers, cupboards under and in couch. The toxic ash continues to drift through my house, continues to seep out from under the gas heater, continues to impact on my health.

I have developed chronic bronchitis not responsive to medication. There are indications the heart problems associated with my illness have worsened.

I have very limited access to local health services. My GP does his best but there is little he can in reality offer. Neither LCHS nor Latrobe Hospital have any expertise nor understanding into my main illness, and their only offerings (most medical staff haven't got a clue) tend to be based on out-of-date erroneous dis-proven assumptions and therefore have high potential to make the disease permanently worse or result in death. There are no specialists available in Latrobe Valley, nor indeed the whole of Gippsland, none visit here. The few in Melbourne have long waiting lists in excess of three years and have little to offer anyhow. Additionally, travelling to their outpatient clinics is not a feasible option for me with my present deteriorating health. None treat late stage severe cases. The nearest who does is interstate.

In any case while ever I continue to live in a high pollution environment no amount of medical intervention is likely to help. It is not only the ever present poison ash in my home. The polluting emissions from power stations, paper mill, etc have seemingly increased over the past year or so. As long as I am daily breathing these poisons the impacts add to the deterioration that began with the mine fire. The longer I remain living in Morwell the shorter my life span is becoming.

The only answer is for me is to leave the Valley, my home of over 30 years and move to cleaner less polluted environment. While I may never actually regain pre-fire health I may at the least stop further deterioration. Moving away is the only chance I have of surviving.

To do so means I need sell my house. I cannot afford to move otherwise. Trouble is property values have fallen markedly since the mine fires. Very very few people want to buy in Morwell. It is very unlikely I, and anyone else in the same boat, would fetch enough from the sale of the house to buy elsewhere. I am 60 years old on a Disability Support Pension. Even with my good credit rating my chances of acquiring a home loan in todays' financial climate are obviously pretty limited. Affordable low loan repayment rates unlikely.

As with others I have spoken with who also want or need to leave, the thought is it would be good if the government/mine owner who created this situation thanks to their failures, bought our houses for the price, at least, that is calculated on our rates notices. Perhaps with a little extra thrown in to cover the costs of moving. A quite reasonable request considering they caused the problem and with the latest round of promised future wealth and job creation, they have every chance of actually making a profit of re-selling such properties at higher return to their future employees.

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Living through the worst of the mine fire, lied to and abandoned to our fate as we choked and suffered in our homes, terrified as we came to realise there would be no help, no evacuation, no authority that gave a damn whether we lived or died, has left the community traumatised. More so for those who were unable to pack their car and leave, yet witnessed so many of our neighbours do so with little thought of those left behind..(mitigated in part perhaps by a mistaken belief the emergency services would assist those abandoned) And pretty much the same demographics between those on low incomes who managed to receive the \$500 DHS emergency relief payments were (still are) subjected to angry resentment & denigration from those on higher incomes and ability to leave who didn't qualify thus missed out. Creating simmering community division that is still festering.

As last summer's fire season drew near the deep trauma became evident, dread in the faces and voices during conversations about the warming weather, panicky responses to the merest whiff of smoke or cfa fire app notices. Even among those who have previously lived through bushfires went through the summer and autumn months in a state of fear. This is not caused so much by the mine fire itself but unlike before Feb 2014, we now know if...when ... the next fire happens we will be completely on our own, again. Before the mine fire we always believed the relevent govt & ngo agencies would do everything in their power to help keep us safe. But now we know. No one will come to help us to safety. No one will even try.

And after the fires, with millions of dollars being handed out towards recovery, very little of it, if any, has brought any benefit for the vast majority of the community living outside of the CBD. Our homes still have ash in them and our families' health is still compromised. With no prospect of this changing any time soon.

Expendable, we are on our own.

This is the lesson Morwell learned from the mine fire.

How to fix this? I don't now. Empty reassurances won't. Token gestures, like a clinic with no doctors & no treatments, an out of town hard to access hospital already known previously for its inadequacies when it comes to responding to the populations needs, won't. Whatever can be implemented must certainly be long-term. It will take much dedicated effort and many years to repair the damage done. And it will need to encompass ALL of the community, not just one or two tiny unrepresentative selections. Not just one side of the railway line.

I know of numerous houses where residents are experiencing ongoing health problems. Indeed, I have yet to come across any household that doesn't. Every one of my neighbours here in Morwell East has. The old woman next door died soon after the fires. Next to her on the other side the young mother had a miscarriage and her small children have been consistently sick with bronchial/asthma type breathing problems. Another neighbour's children, previously healthy, also experience ongoing breathing issues as well as gastro eczema and similar skin rashes. On the other side of that family an older woman who was undergoing breast cancer treatment during the fires, sent home after surgery to her ash-filled house developed infections in the wound as well as recurring bronchitis. She is not doing well at all. Every house in my street has similar issues going on. All of these houses still have flyash in their roofs walls leaking out from under gas heaters and stoves drifting through the houses. Within half an hour of dusting and vacuuming it reappears on surfaces. We are still breathing it in.

These and similar stories are repeated across the town. Doctors have poor understanding of what they are dealing with and treatments are at best guesswork. A bit of education & support there would not go amiss.

The vacuum cleaners with special filters which were supplied to be used by residents were given away and the borrowing scheme wound up far too soon, before many people had the chance to use them. In any case they were only available if you had a car to pick and drop them off. Those people who for various reasons didn't have the opportunity to use the vacuums or find someone to assist had to deal with the toxic ash and dust without. People who continue the on going battle of removing the ash do so with inappropriate equipment putting their and their families' health at further risk.

Until every house in Morwell, and in the surrounding towns throughout Latrobe Valley is free of the fine toxic ash & dust, the vacuums should be given back for community use and the borrowing scheme re-established. This time with provision of having them delivered and picked up where the borrower is unable to access a car to do so themselves. And properly trained helpers available, at no cost, for those unable to perform the tasks themselves.

Better, every house should be properly decontaminated at no cost to the residents or owners. Anything less can only be a bandaid measure while the cause continues to destroy health and lives. Additionally, the damage caused by the acidic dust and ash to insulation, surfaces, paintwork, furnishings, personal items should be repaired or replaced. Apart from the obvious health benefits this would give a huge boost to a demoralised community where everyone would benefit, not just a lucky financially better off few.

Any provisions developed to address the on going disaster in our town should be implemented where people live, not a long distance away in the CBD nor out of town at the hospital where lack of affordable transport and low incomes means restricted access.

Thank you for reading this and, I hope, be considered in your deliberations.