

I live at [REDACTED], Morwell which is located in Morwell South.

On the day of the fire we were all aware that there were fires nearby but these fires were not heading in our direction therefore although we were keeping an eye on them we were not expecting them to come into town as they did. It all happened very quickly, 1 minute there was just a hint of smoke in the distance and the next the fire was right on our door step and we were put on emergency warnings. No one can fault the response times of the CFA or emergency services as this fire really did sneak up on us all and the response times were very fast and they saved our homes and lives because of their response times. Seriously if you took a drive around Morwell's outskirts it will escape you too as to how little was lost in the fires. Soon to everyone's relief we were allowed to go back to our homes and supposedly get on with our lives, unfortunately this was not the case.

Being so close to the open cut the next phase of this fire was pure hell. I mean I expected to come home and have my house smell of smoke because we had just had fires come through. And the initial smell when I walked in my house was exactly that, bushfire smoke had filled the house and you could smell fire through and through. The day was relatively clear and I needed to air my house out as best I could so I opened everything up. All doors and windows just to let the house breathe a little bit more. Within 2 hours the wind had changed and the smoke from the open cut had drifted over and started coming in so I closed everything up again. The smell from the open cut was awful, it was tar like smell

and left a taste in your mouth. Kind of like when you are painting or when spray a chemical.

I expected that it would only last a day or so and then we could air everything out again and it would all be ok, after all we had received no further warnings of us having any issues with this. But this was not the case, we had heard of fire fighters being taken to hospital with carbon monoxide poisoning which was a concern because there is literally 1 street and 4 lanes of freeway between my house and the mine. These concerns were raised and the health dept came in telling us that there was nothing to be concerned with but to stay indoors as much as possible. The problem was that indoors or outdoors it didn't matter because the smoke was coming into our houses. Then on top of the smoke we had the ash, it was falling on us, on our homes, gardens, pets, everything. It was coming under our doors and thru any little crack it could find the house. The only thing I could do to help me stay indoors was to permanently have a fan on my face making it easier to breathe normally.

At age 16 I was diagnosed with slight asthma which meant that I would need to use my pump only if it was smoky or if I had a chest infection and my asthma pump would last me a year. I had managed to use my whole asthma pump in the first 5 days after the fire. I went to the doctor to get another script for another pump and she tested me and diagnosed severe asthma requiring me to not only use my reliever pump a number of times a day but also a steroid preventer twice daily to help me get through. I also have a

heart condition (a first degree block) which slightly increases my heart beat nothing to be concerned with in normal circumstances but when using asthma medication it does become an issue and it beats faster again causing discomfort. The community kept pushing on the whole carbon monoxide line as we were starting to feel physically ill and dizzy, getting headaches and wheezing. We complained so often but were still told there is nothing to worry about. A community meeting was called for and 5 days after the fire started it was held at Kernot Hall in Morwell. There the EPA assured us again that there was no problem with carbon monoxide levels and to alleviate everyones concerns they would place a monitor in the town to monitor these levels.

Less than 24 hours after this monitor was placed in the town we were all sent emergency warning texts at 1.02pm on 15/02/2014 that stated "shelter indoors immediately, close windows/doors/vents". At 6.45pm that same night we were sent texts again advising us "Morwell residents can now go outside and open all doors and windows". The carbon monoxide levels were extreme to the point where we were not able to go outdoors for 5hrs and 43 mins and I have no idea who sent the text telling us to go outside and open our doors and windows because when I looked outside I could not even see the house across the road due to the smoke.

My sister who lives on the other side in Morwell East also had health concerns. She has a 6 year old that was on life support at Royal Childrens Hospital in Aug 2013 due to a lung condition. He

was diagnosed with Child Interstitial Lung disease. Her sons condition had been slightly improving due to treatment with steroids so she called the health department to discuss her situation and Charlie's condition. She was assured that her location was in no danger and that they would not have to leave but to keep him indoors on smokey days. Charlie was kept indoors on smoky days and kept home from school a number of days also yet when he went in for his monthly check up at Royal Childrens hospital in March he had declined so much he needed to be hospitalized again to have a pulse dose of steroids.

By the second week it was becoming unbearable, you went to bed feeling ill, you woke up feeling ill, you became so accustomed to the smoke that you couldn't smell it anymore unless you left and came back. I was tired, had a throat infection, constant headaches and the occasional blood nose. I felt dizzy and was going through my asthmas medication like it was going out of fashion. The asthmas foundation announced it would give ventolin out free of charge which was a great concept only it was prescription so I was not able to take advantage as my dose was more than double what they were giving out. But the health depart kept up with their daily messages – "it is safe to stay in this area just don't go outdoors or exercise too much and we will provide masks for you to wear when outdoors.

Today 18mths on, I am still severe asthmatic, sometimes having to use my pump up to 8 times a day. I also have had an issue with my throat being sore this has been continuous for the last 8 mths or so, I have been told by my doctor this is due to the asthma spasms. My anxiety has gone through the roof, some days not

even being able to leave the house but most nights lack of sleep and nightmares are not only affecting my day to day activities and work but also my health and stability. Every time you smell the hint of smoke its like it all comes back, panic, worry and fear of what will happen.

How can anyone get better when there is the feeling still in the community that you are not important enough to be helped or listened to. How can people get better when roof cavities and homes haven't been cleaned properly. People simply cannot afford to have everything replaced and cleaned and the help we have been given on this is a buckets, pair of gloves and the use of a vacuum cleaner. I still live in the same house, nothing has been done still 18 months later to help those of us affected. The Latrobe City has on occasion put in our local paper for people who still need haven't had their roof cavity cleaned out to contact them. I have done this a number of times always with the promise of a call back but still no has called back and my roof cavity has still not been cleaned out.