

From The Chief Officer.....



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“Our mission is to protect lives and property” 3rd March 2014

Hazelwood Mine Fire-Hazmat Event

Hazelwood generates approximately 24% of Victoria’s power generation capacity. The state of Victoria and the communities we serve are relying upon CFA to manage the site and protect the infrastructure which enables the mine to continue power generation activities. To date this has been achieved with minimal disruption to Victoria’s power supply. The fire has burnt approx. 402 hectares within the open cut mine and is proving to be one of the most complex and challenging emergencies that CFA and the State has faced. It is complex across a range of levels including crew safety, community health impact, protection of critical State infrastructure and assets, mine stability, water balance and has tested our emergency management strategies and structures. The scale, duration and intensity of work effort continues to place significant strain on all members involved. We need to reinforce a careful and considered fatigue management strategy. Over the last three weeks improvements have been made in respite and recovery within the staging area, catering, the health monitoring process, management and tasking of crews within the mine and incident management control structures. The CFA Health Support Team, supported by local health professionals is currently undertaking an average of 1600 health checks a day at the staging area. The ongoing rotation of the same personnel in specific functional roles has also brought efficiencies as working relationships are pre-existing and the knowledge and unique challenges presented by the incident are understood.

The work our crews are undertaking within the mine is difficult and arduous. It is a challenging work environment. I have heard crews tell me that they are unable to see the progress they have made after completing a shift. On a shift to shift basis it may be difficult to see what has been achieved in relatively short periods of time but thermal scans and line scans clearly show the great progress and achievements our crews have made. The use of compressed air foam has proven to be effective in both cooling and suppressing the fire. Today and Wednesday may be similar to what occurred last Tuesday when fire escaped from the mine and came within metres of the power station and the raw coal bunker. As with last week, operational planning for the weather change is occurring and additional strike teams and aircraft have been brought in.

The Morwell community is experiencing levels of stress in relation as a result of the ongoing environmental conditions and potential health impacts. On Friday the Chief Health Officer issued an advice for vulnerable people to temporarily relocate away from the smoke. The advice is aimed at people aged over 65, pre-school aged children (under 5, including babies and infants), pregnant women and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition living or working in Morwell South. A range of organisations, including CFA, continue to engage with and provide information to the affected community. Since 17 February, community engagement teams have spoken to over 16,500 people face-to-face through over 120 separate engagement activities including train travel and walking the streets. Agencies are all acutely aware of rising community frustration and fatigue caused by the duration of the event and presence of smoke and particles in the air.

The adjacent Morwell-Hernes Oak fire (2,788 Ha) was declared SAFE on Sunday morning. The Club Terrace – Goolengook River fire was declared contained last week and the Timbarra-Gil Groggin fire is very close to being contained. The State Control Team is impressed by the outstanding teamwork, commitment and professionalism we see across all of the fire and emergency services.

Thank you. Stay positive. We will put these fires out.

“Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, full effort is full victory “.

- Mahatma Gandhi