

Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Hazardous Material/fire

Information Update 19 February 2014

Background

On Sunday 9 February 2014, a large number of grass fires started around Morwell. As a result, fires impacted a range of infrastructure, including the Hazelwood Power Station and Yallourn Power Station. Fire remains Hazelwood open cut mine in areas that are not part of the working area of the open cut. The fire is expected to burn for a number of weeks. Incident Control planning has been extended to 28 February and will be reviewed every three days.

Substantial work is being undertaken to allow the working area of the open cut mine to continue operation and enable power generation to continue, including ensuring the current fires do not spread to other areas of the mine or spot out into surrounding areas and communities. A substantial amount of resources from all Victorian fire services, with the support of interstate personnel and mine employees, is required on an ongoing basis to successfully manage these fires to the point where they may be handed over to the mine management. The fires in the Hazelwood open cut mine have resulted in significant smoke and, due to the partial combustion of the brown coal, production of carbon monoxide.

Due to the nature of this event this incident has been classified as a hazardous materials/fire.

Current Situation

The current size of both the Hazelwood and Yallourn open cut mine is 426 hectares.

Substantial progress has been made on the fire at the Yallourn open cut mine and it is likely that this fire will transition to the mine operators and on site fire services in the next few days.

The Hazelwood mine hazmat/fire has been sectorised to align with established mine operational production and post-production boundaries:

1. North Batters
2. North Batters
3. Southern Batters
4. Southern Batters
5. Energy Brix
6. Mine Floor
- 7 Working Face

Fire continues to burn on batters for a length of about 1.8km in Southwest Field Sector and a length of about 2 km in East Field Sector of the mine.

- Northern Batters: a new water main has been installed on Level 1 Batter, full length is expected to be finished by the end of the day.
- Eastern Batters: crews made good progress during the night moving approximately 800 metres along the batter; 1/3 of the length of the Eastern Batters is currently contained with small hot spots occurring

- Energy Brix: Significant mineral earth break around eastern side of the mine between Energy Brix and the mine has been constructed.
- Mine Floor: linescan Tuesday afternoon indicated no active fire on mine floor
- Priority to keep fire from working areas of mine
- Linescan has been requested for 0600 to identify hotspots and areas needing work for dayshift

Significant work is being undertaken to engage with the local community including through a community information point (using the CFA mobile education unit) staffed by fire service and Ambulance Victoria staff at the Mid Valley shopping centre in Morwell.

Health and Safety

There are complex health and safety issues specific to the environment and, as part of the suite of plans specific to this incident, a Health Management and Decontamination Plan has been developed to manage the health and safety of all personnel on the fireground at the Hazelwood and Yallourn Mines.

The Plan documents the health, safety and welfare arrangements in relation to:

- General Health and Crew Selection requirements for deployment to Hot Zones
- The health monitoring process for personnel that have been deployed to the mine fire due to the risk posed by elevated levels of Carbon Monoxide
- The management of Personal Protective Clothing & Equipment used in the Hot Zones
- The use of Breathing Apparatus by all personnel working in the Hot Zone

A validation and audit process is part of this plan, including independent validation and random compliance monitoring by third parties.

Carbon Monoxide Information

Carbon monoxide, or CO, is an odourless, colourless gas that can cause sudden illness and death. Exposures to high levels of Carbon Monoxide have significant health impacts. The use of 5% as the limit for operational activity has been determined by a range of Health Professionals including the CFA Medical Officer and MFB Brigade Medical Officer.

This amount is half the recommended level of NIOSH and Safe Work Australia. This level was also determined with consideration given to previous protocols set in past incidents at this site.

Crew Selection

General Health Issues

Individuals, who are heavy smokers, have a history of cardiovascular or respiratory conditions should not be deployed to this incident.

This is due to the increased physiological sensitivities that might be attributable from increased carbon monoxide levels in the open cut fire.

Crews planning to be deployed for a shift in the open cut fires should have 24hrs of “clear time” away from smoke logged incidents (e.g. prior deployments).

Female Personnel

Due to the increased presence of carbon monoxide within the Open Cut Hot Zone there is a risk to the foetus of pregnant women exposed to high levels of concentrations from the carbon monoxide at this incident.

Due to this risk any female fire-fighter who is pregnant or there is any chance they may be pregnant, should not attend this incident due to the increased potential exposure to carbon monoxide.

It is the responsibility of staff who are allocating members to this incident to ensure that the above guideline is followed and ensure that all personnel have been clearly briefed.

Pre Deployment, Pre Entry, Pre Tasking

Prior to deployment personnel are given a Carbon Monoxide Information Sheet and briefed on the risks and safe work practices.

At the commencement of shift crew leaders are given a Crew Leader Instruction for Carbon Monoxide Management.