

Friday, 28 February 2014

NEW HEALTH ADVICE FOR MORWELL SOUTH RESIDENTS

Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester, has today advised people aged over 65, pre-school aged children, pregnant women and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition living or working in Morwell South to consider temporary relocation because of the Hazelwood mine fire.

Latest indications are that the fire may not be extinguished in the near future and as a result Dr Lester has determined the best way for vulnerable people in Morwell South to avoid the continuing smoke and manage their health would be to temporarily relocate.

Over the past two weeks Dr Lester has been advising people in 'at risk' groups to reduce their exposure to smoke and ash. Given this exposure is now likely to continue, advice to temporarily relocate has been issued as a sensible precaution.

"I am making this recommendation as a precaution. We are not currently seeing serious health effects from the smoke, such as an increase in ambulance callouts or hospital attendances," Dr Lester said .

"Health impacts may change if vulnerable people continue to be exposed to the smoke – so I am recommending temporary relocation for people aged over 65, pre-school aged children, pregnant women and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition living or working in Morwell South."

People in these more vulnerable groups should call **1800 006 468** to seek advice and make arrangements for temporary relocation.

Officers from the Department of Human Services are also on hand at the Community Information and Recovery Centre (22 Hazelwood Rd, Morwell, from 9–6 daily), to advise residents on their eligibility for travel, accommodation and financial assistance.

The Red Cross *Register.Find.Reunite.* service is also operating at the centre, to help residents let family and friends know where they will be, if they decide to take a break away from Morwell.

Anyone planning to leave Morwell overnight, or for a longer period, is urged to register in person at the centre, online at www.redcross.org.au or by ringing **1800 727 077**.

"The Department of Human Services is working closely with Latrobe City Council and other support agencies to identify and inform all potentially vulnerable residents in Morwell South, and advise them of the range of support available if they choose to relocate," Dr Lester said.

"Relocation arrangements should continue until advised that air quality has improved.

“The remainder of the Morwell population should follow health advice – that is to stay indoors where possible, take regular breaks out of the smoke-affected area if possible and to avoid prolonged or heavy physical activity.

“Wherever possible, we would urge anyone planning to leave to go and stay with family or friends outside the smoke-affected area. But if you want to relocate, but need some sort of help to do so, then I urge you to contact DHS,” Dr Lester said.

Residents who want further information, but cannot attend the Morwell Community and Information Centre in person, can contact the Department of Human Services on **1800 006 468** and make an appointment to discuss their particular needs.

Media inquiries:

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