

Ash residue in Morwell roof cavities project

Information about volunteering a roof cavity for testing

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is leading a project that will test ash residue in roof cavities in houses in Morwell and is calling for residents to take part.

DHHS will be testing ash from the roof cavities of 50 houses in Morwell and 10 houses in another area in the Gippsland region for comparison. Residents living in Morwell can volunteer their roof cavity for testing. While it may not be possible to offer testing to all who express interest, DHHS will endeavour to keep everyone informed about the results.

Why is this project happening?

In February 2014 the Hazelwood mine fire burnt for 45 days becoming the largest and longest fire in the history of the Latrobe Valley.

At the time, the Latrobe Valley was impacted by smoke and ash from the burning brown coal. As a result, the space between the ceiling and the external roof of houses (roof cavities) may contain coal ash from the mine fire.

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry recommended that the government test and analyse any ash that may have settled in the roof cavities of houses in Morwell and provide advice about any potential known or unknown health effects.

The 'Ash residue in Morwell roof cavities' project will address this recommendation and also allow government agencies to better understand the community's concerns about ash in roof cavities.

Can I volunteer my house for testing?

Anyone living in Morwell can express an interest in having their roof cavity tested. However, 50 houses in Morwell will be selected for testing so it may not be possible to test the roof cavities of everyone who expresses an interest. We may need to invite other houses for testing in order to ensure an appropriate number of roof cavities are tested.

Roof cavities must be able to be safely accessed to allow ash samples to be collected.

If you are a tenant, you should contact your landlord or property agent to gain consent to participate in the project.

Do I need to formally consent to testing?

If your house is selected for testing you will need to sign a consent form. You will be free to withdraw at any time during the project if you change your mind.

Who will do the testing?

DHHS will appoint an independent expert to run the project. This expert will have expertise in scientific analysis and testing, project management, health risk assessment and talking with communities. They will:

- set out how the testing and analysis will be done
- contract an occupational hygienist to collect and analyse ash samples
- provide expert advice to DHHS and the community
- prepare a high quality report that:
 - shows the results of the occupational hygienist's sampling and analysis
 - assesses any health risks of ash in the roof cavity
 - recommends next steps.

How will the 50 houses be selected?

The independent expert will select the houses to be tested from all those who have registered an interest in participating in the testing. They need to ensure a good cross-section of houses and locations are included in the project. If your house is selected for testing you will be contacted by the contractor and provided with a consent form and information about the testing.

How long will it take to collect samples from my roof cavity?

It is expected that it will take between 45 minutes to one hour to collect samples from your roof cavity. You will need to be home during this time. A time will be arranged with you if your house is selected for testing.

What are the advantages of taking part?

Taking part in this project means that you will be assisting your community in understanding whether there are any potential health risks from ash in roof cavities from the Hazelwood coal mine fire.

You may also be interested in getting feedback on the state of your roof cavity. If you are a tenant, you should contact your landlord or property agent to gain consent to participate in the project.

How will my information be used?

Any identifiable information that is collected about your home in connection with this project will remain confidential. Your name or address will not be used in any of the documents published about the project.

How do I register my interest?

To register your interest in receiving updates about the project, or to volunteer your house for testing you can:

- complete the online registration form at: <http://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/hazelwood/ash-project>
- pick up a registration form from Latrobe City Council
- download a registration form from <http://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/hazelwood/ash-project>

Return instructions are included on the registration form.

Please register your interest using one of the options above by Monday 15 August 2016.

If you are interested in participating please feel free to ask questions before signing the consent form. You can send questions to: ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Where can I get more information?

Department of Health and Human Services

Community updates and resources will be published on a dedicated project page at:

<http://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/hazelwood/ash-project>

Questions about the project can be directed to:

ashproject@dhhs.vic.gov.au

DHHS advises residents not to go into their roof cavities without expert advice or without following safety precautions.

For information about hazards in roof cavities go to <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/environmental-health-in-the-home/hazards-in-roof-cavities> or call 1300 761 874 during business hours.

Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry

For more information on the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry visit www.hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 761 874, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email environmental.healthunit@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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