

Monitoring air quality in fire affected areas

March 18, 2009

Why carry out air monitoring for asbestos?

We are responding to community concerns about air quality, particularly asbestos, in areas affected by the 7 February 2009 bushfires.

Who is doing the work?

The EPA and the Department of Human Services are working together to monitor air quality in the affected areas.

What areas are being monitored?

General community areas such as town halls, schools and the 'main street' in bushfire affected areas are being monitored.

Not all locations can be monitored. The aim is to monitor areas with the most bushfire affected properties.

What about air monitoring during clean up operations?

The air monitoring does not provide information about specific properties or in the immediate vicinity of clean up activities.

Licensed contractors engaged in clean up activities are subject to a compliance code for removing asbestos, which includes strict measures to control dusts that may contain asbestos.

What about when I return to inspect my property?

When inspecting fire-damaged properties you should take precautions to minimise the risk from any disturbance of the dust and ashes:

- Do not stir up dust or ashes
- Wear a personal protection kit, available from community hubs, relief and recovery centres
- Do NOT undertake property clean-up
- Do NOT take children to damaged or destroyed properties.

What do the results mean?

The monitoring can detect fibres down to levels of 0.01 fibres/ml.

Results greater than this level do not imply an immediate health threat.

Asbestos exposure becomes a health concern when high concentrations of asbestos fibres are inhaled over a long period. Illness is very unlikely to result from a single exposure or from a short period of exposure to lower levels.

At what level will action be taken?

The monitoring method used counts all fibres in air. If we find results above the level of 0.01 fibres we carry out further analysis to confirm the presence of asbestos.

If the results exceed 0.03 fibres/ml then action (such as increasing dust suppression measures) will be taken to reduce the exposure of the community.

The 24 hour airborne asbestos sampling results are listed in the following Table.

Results

Location	Sampling period	Number of samples	Results
Callignee (cnr of Neaves and Pumps rd)	08 to 16 March 2009	8	Less than 0.01 fibre/ml
Kinglake (Recovery Centre)	07 to 16 March 2009	9	Less than 0.01 fibre/ml
Flowerdale (CFA)	07 to 16 March 2009	9	Less than 0.01 fibre/ml
Buxton (CFA)	07 to 16 March 200	9	Less than 0.01 fibre/ml
Kinglake West (Uniting Church)	07 to 16 March 2009	9	Less than 0.01 fibre/ml
Narbethong (Camping store)	08 to 16 March 2009	8	Less than 0.01 fibre/ml

Test method is in accordance with the 2005 NOHSC Guidance Note on the membrane filter method for estimating airborne asbestos fibres 2nd edition. Laboratory analysis has been carried out by a NATA accredited laboratory.

Authorised by Victorian Government, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.
March 2009

Department of Human Services

Where can I get further information?

If you have any further questions please contact DHS Environmental Health Unit on **1300 761 874** or EPA Victoria on **9695 2722**.

