Fire preparedness activities

A CLOSE-UP LOOK

The new Latrobe City Mayor and Deputy Mayor were among community representatives given a close-up look at ENGIE Hazelwood's fire preparedness program recently.

Councillors Darrell White and Dan Clancey joined community and CFA representatives including Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner, Rae McKay; Chair of the Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, Susan Lloyd; the Latrobe Valley Authority's Janet Needham; and CFA District 27 Operations Officer, Emma Conway.

Prior to the site tour, Hazelwood's Manager of Security and Emergency Services, Alan Roach, briefed the group in the Emergency Command Centre, which is manned by key personnel on days of extreme fire danger.

The group then travelled by bus to the Mine Lookout where they viewed water sprays operating, Dredger 25 which is being used to dig overburden for distribution over exposed coal batters and the Northern Batters Fire Services lookout, where they saw large water tankers in action.

They also watched a demonstration by one of four huge tankers on site, each carrying 30,000 litres of water. The tankers disperse water from different sprays located on the front, back, top and sides of the trucks.

The Mine's Technical Services Manager, James Faithful and Mine Superintendent, Dave Shanahan, outlined fire preparedness and rehabilitation activities.

Drone keeps a watchful eye

Drone technology plays an important part in the fire preparedness of ENGIE Hazelwood.

This is the second year a drone was used to assist in testing the wet areas of the Mine with great results. Previously, light aircraft undertook this work.

Hazelwood's Spatial Coordinator, John McCormack, said it was important to test the sprays on 120 kilometres of Fire Service pipe network and ensure the spray patterns were effective along the coal surfaces. This is one of a number of seasonal fire preparedness measures undertaken prior to the commencement of Hazelwood's own fire season, which this year was declared on 1 November.

"We turn on fire service sprays in the Mine and then do an inspection of the water coverage from the air, taking video and photographs," John said. "It was often difficult using a light aircraft because the weather could be unpredictable and we would need to take photographs from the plane's windows.

"It also took considerable time to conduct a sufficient number of fly-overs above the Mine, which totals 1280 hectares in area."

John said the drone, with a camera attached, was more adept at photographing the Mine in sections.

"We can send the drone up at a moment's notice if the weather is good," he said. "We can also review the footage immediately."

John said where the drone footage revealed that further coverage was required, having regard to the applicable technical guidelines for the fire service system, this was promptly addressed. This could include additional works on or enhancements to existing pipes and sprays.

"We get a very clear picture," he said. "The drone enables us to validate the work we do, with before and after images."

The drone can also be used in the event of a fire to deliver real time information to Incident Controllers, to assist in containing fire.

The drone is not only used within the Hazelwood Mine for fire preparedness. It is used for mapping and survey work, as well as for close inspections of hard-to-access areas of the Mine, such as the steep batter walls.