

Fact sheet: industrial fires



Environment
Protection
Authority Victoria



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Fact sheet

Overview

During an industrial fire, EPA's role is to provide support to emergency response agencies, such as the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).

We provide the community with information during the incident so they can protect their health and make informed choices about outdoor activity. We ensure the site is cleaned up to meet community expectations.

Why are industrial fires different to bushfires?

Industrial sites may store a range of chemicals used in the manufacturing process, as well as produce a range of products. Therefore, if an industrial site has a fire, there can be a large range of pollutants released from the site that may end up in the local environment.

The chemicals stored at industrial sites and the manufacturing processes and products made can vary widely, so there can be a large range of pollutants released during a fire. For example, firewater from the West Footscray factory fire in August 2018 washed a range of chemicals, including industrial solvents, detergents and fire and soot by-products into Stony Creek.

Air quality

During major air pollution events, we may:

- deploy incident air monitoring equipment
- monitor and assess air quality, and communicate this information to the State Incident Controller, other response agencies and the community through [AirWatch](#) on our website
- use modelling and forecasting to provide information about air quality impacts.

Further information and updates

Contact EPA on
1300 372 842 (24 hours)
(1300 EPA VIC)
or epa.vic.gov.au

- Incident information and updates:
emergency.vic.gov.au
- If you are experiencing any symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure, seek medical advice or contact NURSE-ON-CALL: 1300 60 60 24
- Up-to-date air quality information:
epa.vic.gov.au/airwatch
- Information about smoke and your health:
epa.vic.gov.au/smoke
- Emergency information:
epa.vic.gov.au/our-work/emergency-information
- For information about safe disposal of asbestos after a fire, see *After a fire: asbestos hazards* (EPA publication 1719)



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Smoke

Smoke from bushfires, planned burns and industrial fires can impact air quality. Small particles in smoke usually cause the most concern. Children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing health conditions need to be particularly careful during smoky conditions.

What should I do?

- Where possible, avoid exposure to the smoke.
- If you have heart or lung conditions, follow your treatment plan.
- Look out for elderly neighbours, or other people at risk.
- If you continue to feel unwell, seek medical help.

Odour

There may be some odour present that has come from what is burning at the site.

What should I do?

Avoid the area if the odour makes you feel unwell. Seek medical help if you continue to feel unwell.

Asbestos

For information about the health risks of asbestos and safe disposal of asbestos after a fire, refer to the fact sheet *After a fire: asbestos hazards* (EPA publication 1719).

More information about the health risks of asbestos is available at asbestos.vic.gov.au

For information about the safe disposal of asbestos, visit worksafe.vic.gov.au/asbestos

Waterways

Pollutants present in firewater from industrial fires may be toxic to the environment, and cause the death of fish, aquatic animals, and plants. They may also cause irritation to people or animals who touch affected water.

For fires at industrial sites, EPA officers provide advice to MFB and/or CFA about capturing the run-off water used to extinguish the fire to minimise any impacts on local waterways.

However, during big fires, large volumes of water are needed to put out the fire, and some may unavoidably end up in waterways.

You may also notice that waterways might smell if they have been affected by firewater from an industrial fire.

What should I do?

When nearby waterways have been affected by industrial firewater run-off:

- avoid contact with the water
- avoid any sludge that may be present
- if you come into contact with contaminated water or sludge, remove wet clothing and wash with soapy water
- don't allow your pets to swim in or drink the water
- don't eat fish from the affected waterway
- avoid the area if there is odour that is making you feel unwell
- seek medical help if you continue to feel unwell.