

Carbon monoxide monitoring around Sarsfield peat fire



Environment
Protection
Authority Victoria



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Community information

Sarsfield peat fire

Since 3 January 2020, CFA and EPA have been monitoring levels of carbon monoxide (CO) in smoke from the peat fire in Sarsfield, Victoria.

Carbon monoxide concentrations in Sarsfield have been consistently low, well below levels that would impact health.

In consultation with the CFA Incident Controller, EPA stopped monitoring for carbon monoxide at Sarsfield on 26 January 2020. EPA also stopped monitoring PM_{2.5} at the same time because the results were the same as results from EPA's Bairnsdale monitoring site.

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a common pollutant and is a clear, odourless gas. Smoke and exhaust fumes often contain carbon monoxide.

In Victoria, carbon monoxide levels are normally low in the outside air. Although carbon monoxide can affect your health, you're very unlikely to experience high carbon monoxide levels in the outside air, even during a fire. High levels are much more likely inside, for example if you have a faulty gas heater.

Carbon monoxide is measured as parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere. Health is affected when levels are above 70 ppm for an hour or more.

Why we measure carbon monoxide around a peat fire

Peat smoke differs from normal wood smoke because of what is in the peat and how it burns. Peat smoke contains fine particles, water vapour and gases including carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides.

Peat smoke can release larger volumes of carbon monoxide than wood smoke. When peat burns it produces gases that have a distinct acrid smell and can be irritating to your airways.

Peat usually smoulders (burning slowly at a low temperature) rather than burning with an open flame. This is why peat fires can be difficult to put out and why smoke is often low to the ground.

Peat smoke is often more visible than smoke from bushfires. This is due to large amounts of water vapour in the smoke.

More information about the effects of carbon monoxide can be found on [EPA's website](#).

There are guidelines for outdoor work in areas impacted by bushfire smoke available on [WorkSafe's website](#).

Further information

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

Incident information and updates:
VicEmergency hotline 1800 226 226
emergency.vic.gov.au
or listen to your local emergency radio station

Up-to-date air quality information:
epa.vic.gov.au/AirWatch





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Sarsfield monitoring location

This map shows the location of the monitors in relation to the fire zone.

EPA monitoring commenced at Nicholson, 5km to the south. This monitor was moved to Sarsfield EPA 1.



Map 2: Location of the fire zone  and the EPA  and CFA  CO monitors
Carbon monoxide data provided by CFA

General health information

Air quality can change rapidly, so we advise you to go to EPA AirWatch (epa.vic.gov.au/AirWatch) to monitor conditions.

For incident information, listen to your local emergency radio station or visit www.emergency.vic.gov.au

People with a heart or lung condition, including asthma, children (up to 14 years), pregnant women and people over 65 years of age are more sensitive to the effects of breathing in smoke.

If you have a heart or lung condition, take your medication as prescribed. Asthmatics should follow their personal asthma action plan and keep reliever medication on hand.

If you or anyone in your care is experiencing symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure, call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24 or seek medical advice.

Anyone experiencing difficulty breathing, wheezing or tightness in the chest should seek urgent medical assistance – call 000