

**Response given to Singleton Argus and Newcastle Herald regarding the Department's compliance activities during windy conditions in the Hunter Valley**

*Response given on 7 July 2011:*

During a dust inspection of an Upper Hunter Valley coal mine on Monday, July 4, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure was advised that preparations were underway for adverse weather conditions forecast for the coming days.

The Department proactively undertook surveillance and inspections at 10 mines on Tuesday, July 5, in response to the extreme wind. The mines which were inspected had either suspended all mining activities or had moved activities to deeper, sheltered parts of the pits to reduce dust emissions. A number of mines advised that water carts were deployed to wet down exposed areas to minimise windborne dust. A further seven mining operations were observed on Wednesday, July 6, by which stage dust emission levels had reduced significantly. While the dust levels in the Hunter Valley were high this week, the Department observed that most of this was wind-generated dust from exposed areas of the mine sites, rather than from mining activities.

The Department received one dust complaint on Tuesday in relation to the Hunter Valley Operations complex (Cheshunt pit), located near the Maison Dieu monitor. Officers conducted an inspection and observed that the mine had ceased all mining operations, with the exception of activity deep in the pit in an area sheltered from the wind. There was no observable dust being generated as a result of that activity and no further action was required. No complaints were received by the Department relating to dust emissions from Rixs Creek mine.

The Department's compliance officers subscribe to alerts from the Upper Hunter Air Quality Network, as other members of the public can also do. However, the emphasis of the Department's compliance activities in the Hunter Valley is on being proactive through surveillance and inspections, rather than only being reactive when high dust levels are recorded by the Upper Hunter Air Quality Network.

The Department carried out a third consecutive day of surveillance of Upper Hunter Valley coal mines today (Thursday, July 7) in response to adverse wind conditions. Eight mining operations were observed today, with only minor dust emissions observed at one mine site. The Department contacted the mine's management, and they responded by immediately taking action to relocate operations to a more sheltered area of the mine site.

Dust emissions from coal mining operations had decreased significantly since the peak on Tuesday. Fine dust particles which build up over time across the mine sites, combined with gale force winds on Tuesday, is believed to have been the probable cause of elevated dust levels.

The Department will continue to proactively monitor and assess mining related dust emissions across the Hunter Valley and conduct random inspections to ensure that mines are complying with conditions of approval, particularly in relation to dust emissions.