

QUESTIONS

Can you please confirm whether or not testing has been carried out at HMAS Cairns or surrounding areas for the firefighting chemicals perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA)?

- When were the tests carried out?
- What were the results?

RESPONSE TO ALL

Defence undertakes periodic groundwater and surface water quality sampling as part of an environmental monitoring program across the Defence estate.

Recent periodic sampling undertaken at HMAS Cairns in May 2016 did detect the presence of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) on the base. Defence will receive a final report relating to the May 2016 environmental monitoring sampling within the next six weeks. Once this report is received, Defence will provide further advice to the local and state authorities.

Defence is committed to engaging with the relevant state authorities, the local council and community residents with respect to any future investigation that may be required for HMAS Cairns.

Background:

Specialised Aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) was used for nearly 50 years across a range of major military bases, civilian aerodromes and industrial facilities around Australia for critical national defence and other purposes to rapidly extinguish liquid fuel fires.

Chemicals in the older fire fighting foams - in particular, Perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), PFOS and PFOA - were also used in a range of industrial, commercial and domestic products.

In 2003 Defence became aware that this was an emerging contaminant. From 2004, Defence transitioned to a new product called Ansulite for use on the Defence estate. The product currently used by Defence is a more environmentally safe product and does not contain PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients.

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the extent and levels of PFOS and PFOA on, and in the vicinity of, some of its bases around Australia.

As well as a number of detailed environmental site investigations already underway, a preliminary sampling program has also commenced at a number of sites.

Defence is continuing to work with Commonwealth, State and local authorities to investigate this legacy issue. This issue is not unique to Defence.

Most people living in developed nations will have some level of PFOS and PFOA in their body as these chemicals were also used in common household and industrial applications, such as in the manufacture of non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, food packaging and in some industrial processes.

According to the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) Perfluorinated Chemicals Guidance Statements released on 16 March 2016, there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects. Because

Response provided to journalist
26 August 2016

these compounds persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure is minimised as a precaution.

The enHealth Guidance Statements are available from the Department of Health at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publthpublicat-environ.htm>

Defence has established a national website to facilitate access to information regarding its PFOS and PFOA investigation program:
<http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>

Defence has also established a national telephone number: 1800 365 414 and email address:
PFCDefenceCoordination@golder.com.au

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