

QUESTIONS

- 1. Could you please send me the information about defence saying it will reimburse residents at Oakey (and one other place) for the blood testing.**
- 2. And please let me know when those reimbursements will happen.**
- 3. And secondly could I get an approximate date of when the health assessments are due?**

RESPONSE TO ALL

The Government announced in June 2016 that it will invest \$55 million to manage PFAS contamination at Defence bases including an epidemiological study that will look at potential patterns, causes and health effects in communities exposed to elevated levels of PFAS. The Government will also fund voluntary blood testing, specialised mental health and counselling services and dedicated Community Liaison Officers at Oakey and Williamtown.

Defence is working with the Commonwealth Department of Health and other relevant agencies to finalise its arrangements for implementing this program as soon as possible.

In the interim, Defence has established arrangements to reimburse individuals in the Williamtown and Oakey environmental investigation areas who have already obtained PFAS blood tests, and to meet the costs of PFAS blood testing for individuals in the Williamtown and Oakey environmental investigation areas who wish to obtain a blood test prior to the Commonwealth-funded voluntary blood testing program commencing.

Individuals who live or work, or have lived or worked, in the environmental investigation areas around RAAF Base Williamtown and the Army Aviation Centre Oakey are eligible under these interim arrangements. If these individuals consent to their blood test results being included in the broader epidemiological study, then those results will be included. Inclusion in the epidemiological study is entirely voluntary.

Defence will meet the cost of a PFAS blood test, and a pre- and post-blood test consultation with a general practitioner (where those GP costs are not otherwise covered by the Medicare system). These interim arrangements will be in place until the Commonwealth-funded voluntary PFAS blood testing program commences.

Individuals seeking reimbursement will need to provide Defence with a valid receipt, and advice of relevant bank details to facilitate reimbursement through Electronic Funds Transfer or cheque.

Individuals seeking payment of an invoice will need to provide Defence with a valid unpaid invoice, and relevant details to enable Defence to provide payment to that service provider.

Claims, including scanned documents, should be sent to:

Email: PFC.Coordination@defence.gov.au

Defence is already processing a number of requests for reimbursement and payment of invoices.

Defence is currently finalising the Human Health Risk Assessment and the Ecological Risk Assessment. These are due to be finalised in August and September 2016 respectively. The results of both assessments will assist Defence and the Queensland government to determine next steps. Defence will keep the community updated of the likely release date of these reports and engage with the local community on these results at the earliest opportunity.

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. In that same year, Defence released a specification for the supply and testing of AFFF concentrates.

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 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-pubhlthpublicat-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