

1. What were the names of the chemicals that are believed to cause the toxins? What were they used in?

4. Are these chemicals currently being used at the RAAF base?

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

Aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) containing perfluorooctane sulfate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) was used extensively worldwide and within Australia by both civilian and military authorities due to its effectiveness in extinguishing liquid fuel fires.

From the mid 2000s Defence transitioned to a new product called Ansulite for use on the Defence estate, which is more environmentally friendly, and stopped using AFFF that contained PFOS and PFOA for training purposes. For fire fighting training, Defence now uses a specialised training foam that mimics the performance of AFFF, is environmentally friendly and does not contain PFOS and PFOA.

When Defence uses the new formulation of fire fighting foam to test equipment, waste water is captured and disposed of in accordance with current regulations. Where possible, when fire fighting foam is used in cases of emergency, it is also captured and disposed of in accordance with current regulations.

PFOS and PFOA 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.

Most people living in developed nations will have levels of PFOS and PFOA in their body as these compounds have also been used in common household and industrial applications.

2. What will the investigation entail?

Defence is currently undertaking a preliminary sampling program at RAAF Base Edinburgh to understand if PFOS and PFOA are present on the base.

Subject to what is found, a detailed site investigation may follow. If so, it will be undertaken in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure (NEPM) framework.

Defence is taking a responsible and proactive approach to this issue and is working closely with relevant Commonwealth, State and local authorities.

3. What was the reason behind this investigation? What caused it?

In 2009, a limited ability to consistently test for the presence and concentration of PFOS/PFOA became available. In December 2011, Defence added PFOS and PFOA to its routine environmental monitoring program.

Since that time and based on the historical use of AFFF, Defence has identified a number of bases requiring further investigation. RAAF Base Edinburgh is one of those bases.

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>

Response provided to journalist
14 June 2016

For additional information and background on this issue please see Defence Submission Part A (Submission 87) to the Senate Inquiry into the Contamination of Australia's Defence Force facilities and other Commonwealth, state and territory sites in Australia, which is available at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=864cf11b-de5b-4d49-94af-3cff3a595cf6&subId=407504>

5. When will the investigation be completed?

Defence anticipates preliminary sampling results from RAAF Base Edinburgh will be finalised by late August 2016.

Defence is being open and transparent in making the verified sampling results available to State/Territory and local authorities, as well as relevant property owners.

A timeline for the conduct of a detailed site investigation (if required) will not be known until the results of preliminary sampling have been confirmed.

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