

Response provided to journalist  
26 October 2016

**Questions:**

- Has the Dept of Defence been door-knocking and handing out bottles of water for drinking to residents this week? If so, why?

- Has the report on the preliminary sampling program been released? If not, when is it expected to be released and what is causing the delay? If so, where can I access it?

- We have received reports that the Dept of Defence has found (while carrying out its sampling program) evidence of water contamination in Katherine, Northern Territory. Is this true? If so, what were the details of the findings? What was it contaminated by? Was it caused by firefighters foam? Where was the contamination found? Who does it affect, how and why?

- Has the Dept of Defence found any evidence of water contamination by firefighters' foam elsewhere as part of its sampling program? If so, what was it contaminated by, when and where?

- Anything to add?

**Response to all:**

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the extent and levels of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), including 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 been undertaken at 12 Defence sites across Australia, including RAAF Base Tindal in Katherine, Northern Territory. The purpose of the preliminary sampling program is to understand if PFAS are present on, or in the vicinity of the base.

Preliminary sampling conducted at RAAF Base Tindal was undertaken in June 2016. Groundwater and surface water samples were collected on base and in the vicinity of the base. Subject to the outcomes of the preliminary sampling program, a detailed environmental investigation may be undertaken at selected sites. If a detailed investigation program is to be conducted for RAAF Base Tindal, the details of the investigations will be provided to the local community at the earliest opportunity.

Defence has completed a quality assurance review of the draft report for the preliminary sampling program. The report has recently been provided to relevant Northern Territory Government authorities for review and consultation. Following these consultations, Defence will then release the results and the proposed investigation program to the general public. A date for the public release of the results is not yet confirmed but we anticipate that will be in early November 2016.

Defence has not been door knocking or handing out bottled water to residents of Katherine as there has been no testing or sampling within the township of Katherine.

Preliminary sampling was undertaken in the vicinity of RAAF Base Tindal and Defence is communicating with those landowners where sampling has been undertaken and will offer alternate drinking water as a standard precautionary measure where required.

Further information regarding the National PFAS Investigation and Management Program can be found at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>

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**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 has significantly reduced environmental impact 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 and updated on 24 June 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 also established a national telephone number: 1800 365 414 and email address: [PFCDefenceCoordination@golder.com.au](mailto:PFCDefenceCoordination@golder.com.au)