

Response provided to journalist
27 September 2016

What is Defence's current position on the scale of contamination at Oakey and other Australian Defence sites?

Does Defence propose to compensate residents with health and other concerns? (such as property value and business losses)?

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.

In 2003 Defence became aware that chemicals in the older fire fighting foams - in particular, perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) – were an emerging contaminant. From 2004, Defence transitioned to a new product called Ansulite for use on the Defence estate which has a significantly reduced environmental impact and does not contain PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients.

As part of the environmental investigation at the Army Aviation Centre Oakey (AACO) and surrounding area, Defence has recently completed a Environmental Site Assessment and Human Health Risk Assessment.

The Environmental Site Assessment provides information about the levels and extent of PFAS compounds in the investigation area, while the Human Health Risk Assessment identifies potential exposure pathways. The assessments were carried out by independent international environmental experts AECOM, in collaboration with relevant Queensland Government departments, including Environment and Heritage Protection, Health, Agriculture and Fisheries and Natural Resources and Mines.

The Environmental Site Assessment report and Human Health Risk Assessment report for Oakey can be found at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/ID/Oakey/Documents.asp>

The Australian Government has sought advice on possible next steps, including the circumstances under which the Government should consider any property acquisition.

Defence has been providing water assistance to Oakey residents who use bore water in the investigation area for drinking water since May 2014 and will, in consultation with Toowoomba Regional Council, look at any further needs.

The Government has committed to investing \$55 million from the existing Defence budget to manage, contain and remediate PFAS contamination at Defence bases. This includes funding an epidemiological study to be led by the Department of Health that will look at potential patterns, causes and health effects in communities exposed to elevated levels of PFAS.

The Government is establishing dedicated mental health and counseling services in all affected communities and a dedicated Community Liaison Officer commenced at Oakey on 5 September 2016 to link residents to these and other Government support services.

The Government is establishing a voluntary blood testing program for residents living within the investigation areas at Oakey and Williamtown with the ability to expand the program where clear exposure pathways have been identified and endorsed by the Department of Health.

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

Managing the contamination is a key priority for Defence and trials on a number of remediation and management techniques are underway to progress this including:

- Ongoing remediation and management trials (Solidification, Stabilisation, and Foam Separation);

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- Commencement of groundwater remediation through pilot trials; and
- Continuing to assess international remediation capabilities.

Defence is also examining how to manage the movement of PFAS from the base in surface water carried in local drains.

Background

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the extent and levels of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on, and in the vicinity of, some of its bases around Australia.

Defence is currently conducting environmental investigations, undertaken by experienced environmental services in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure at 18 sites across Australia. Defence is also continuing to work with Commonwealth, State and local authorities to investigate this legacy issue.

Most people living in developed nations will have some level of PFAS 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.

Defence has established a national website, phone number and email address to facilitate access to information regarding its PFAS investigation program:

Further information can be found at <http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp> or by calling 1800 365 414 or emailing: PFCDefenceCoordination@golder.com.au

**Please explain the revised safety standards for PFOS and PFOA. Why are they in line with 2008 European levels that have been dismissed as outdated in many countries?
Was the process independent? (considering the consultants' defence contracts)**

Questions regarding the review of the human health reference values should be directed to the Department of Health.

Does Defence acknowledge reported links between these chemicals and serious health concerns?

Defence is not an authority on community health. Questions regarding health should be directed to relevant State and Federal health authorities.

The enHealth Guidance Statements are available from the Department of Health at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publhlthpublicat-environ.htm>