

Questions:

1. Is there any plan to blood test firefighters at Pearce air base as part of the PFAS investigation?
2. If yes why will firefighters be tested and will their results be part of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University epidemiological study? Or is that only available to Williamstown and Oakey residents?
3. If yes will residents also be tested so that pooled community samples over time may help determine the success or otherwise of exposure reduction measures?
4. If no why aren't firefighters at Pearce going to be tested?
5. Is it possible that firefighters at Pearce if tested could record very high levels of PFOS, PFHxS and PFOA as they were the people working and training with the firefighting foams containing these chemicals?
6. Has the department considered that some of the areas off the base, which have recorded higher than expected levels of the chemicals could have been caused by firefighters taking vehicles such as the light tanker home with them?
7. Is the department taking any extra measures to minimise Pearce firefighters exposure to these chemicals given that firefighting foams containing trace elements of the chemicals (PFOS and PFOA) are still being used? Does Ansulite contain trace elements of PFHxS?

Response:

The Australian Government, led by the Department of Health, has established a Voluntary Blood Testing Program for people that work or live, or have worked or lived, within the investigation areas at Williamstown and Oakey. This includes people currently living elsewhere who previously lived or worked at these places.

The Voluntary Blood Testing Program is being conducted in conjunction with an epidemiological study and these activities are focussed on the Oakey and Williamstown communities because the extent of contamination and the exposure pathways are well understood. The extent of contamination at other sites, including RAAF Base Pearce, is still being determined. These activities at Williamstown and Oakey will contribute to our understanding of the potential health risks associated with PFAS and inform decisions on the potential for similar activities at other sites in the future.

The health and safety of all personnel working at Defence properties is a primary concern of Defence.

When assessing and managing any risks to human health posed by PFOS and PFOA, Defence has regard to the guidance statements issued by the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth). The enHealth guidance statements advise that there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects. However, because these chemicals persist in

humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure to these chemicals is minimised as a precaution.

Defence has implemented precautionary measures by supplying the provision of bottled water for residents who are reliant on bore water and do not have access to town water and are located in the current Investigation Area. Currently, there are 93 properties receiving bottled water.

Defence has a comprehensive work health and safety management system in place to ensure that it meets its duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth) (WHS Act). All Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) products used by Defence must meet and be used in accordance with the requirements of the WHS Act. Defence ensures the safety of its workers by conducting occupational exposure health risk assessments to mitigate exposure to possible known contaminants. Where it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate risks, Defence aims to minimise those risks so far as is reasonably practicable which may include the use of protective equipment and protocols when handling chemicals or material contaminated by chemicals.

Defence engages with local stakeholders as part of the detailed environmental investigation to develop a greater understanding of the various uses and source sites of the legacy AFFF product in the Investigation area. A sampling plan is then developed by Defence incorporating this local input.

Defence understands that Perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS) was never an active ingredient in the AFFF used by Defence or any other AFFF. PFHxS was commonly found in the legacy AFFFs as an impurity in the manufacturing process. Defence understands that PFHxS has not been identified in Ansulite post 2004. Prior to that it may have an impurity or the result of cross contamination.