

Questions

- How does the government respond to criticisms that it acted too slowly to cease using 3M Lightwater after NICNAS recommended it be phased out in 2003?
- Why was the DoD so slow to inform the public once it became aware of contamination at Williamstown in early 2012?
- Why does defence still use the Ansulite product?
- Does defence dispute the health concerns about PFCs, particularly their links to kidney and testicular cancer?
- There are six current investigations and 12 pending investigations of contamination at bases across Australia. How confident is DoD that those contaminations do not pose health risks to surrounding residents?
- Why has the government paid no compensation to affected residents, including those who have had their property values reduced or their livelihoods (fishing, farming etc) destroyed?
- Why are the PFAS/PFOA safe levels in Australia so markedly different from other countries, including the USA and Germany?

And on the childcare centre in Williamstown:

- Why is the government seeking to build a childcare centre on Williamstown base, given the investigation into contamination risk at the site is still not finalised?

Response

The Australian Government has been working to reduce use of certain per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) since 2003. PFAS are a group of manufactured chemicals that have been widely used, globally, since the 1950s to make common household products and specialty applications, including non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection, food packaging, some industrial processes and fire-fighting foams (Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF) products).

Defence commenced phasing out its use of 3M Lightwater in 2004 and the legacy AFFF containing perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) as active ingredients. Perfluorohexane Sulfonate (PFHxS) was also commonly found in the legacy AFFFs as an impurity in the manufacturing process. The AFFF now used by Defence, called Ansulite, is a more environmentally friendly product that does not contain PFOS, PFOA or PFHxS as active ingredients and only contains trace elements of the chemicals. Defence has commissioned various comparative studies to understand the toxicity of different AFFF products. One such study conducted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Contamination

Assessment and Remediation of the Environment (CRC CARE) compared the toxicity, persistence and bioaccumulation of Ansulite and Solberg RF6. The study found that in laboratory conditions Ansulite was less toxic than Solberg to all test organisms used in the study and that in general Solberg was more toxic than Ansulite.

Ansulite is primarily used by Defence in emergency situations where human life is at risk, or in controlled environments to test equipment. Any Ansulite used for testing is captured, treated and/or disposed of at licensed waste disposal facilities. All aqueous film forming foam products must meet (and be used in accordance with) the requirements of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)*, the *Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 (Cth)*, and Defence policy.

In December 2011, routine water quality monitoring, which included PFAS chemicals, found elevated levels on RAAF Base Williamtown. Further testing conducted in 2012 identified some detects of PFAS on-base and at the boundary. Defence provided notification of this to Hunter Water Corporation and the NSW EPA. In March 2013, Defence conducted a Stage 1 Environmental Investigation into the presence of PFAS on-base and outlined recommendations for further sampling and analysis which commenced in May 2014 during the Stage 2 Environmental Investigation.

The local community were advised about the investigation into PFAS when it commenced off-base in 2014. Defence launched a public website to advise the community of the Stage 2 Environmental Investigation works and provided a flyer with drilling activities, an overview of the project, as well as supplied a list of frequently asked questions with answers. At this time, Defence also wrote to the relevant local and State agencies and stakeholders, to advise of the commencement of the drilling and sampling program.

The reports associated with the investigations at RAAF Base Williamtown can be found at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/ID/Williamtown/Documents.asp>

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the nature and extent of PFAS, on and around Defence sites in Australia. Currently, Defence has engaged independent environmental consultants to conduct detailed environmental investigations at 18 Defence sites across Australia in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure (NEPM) framework. This will be one of the largest environmental investigation programs ever undertaken in Australia.

The objective of the environmental investigations is to identify the nature and extent of PFAS in the environment from legacy AFFF use at the bases and any potential risks to people or the environment. The understanding of these potential risks will assist in developing mitigation strategies to manage exposure.

In June 2016, the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth), which is a subcommittee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), published guidance statements advising that there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects.

However, since these chemicals remain in humans and the environment for many years, it is recommended that as a precaution, human exposure to PFAS be minimised.

Further information can be found in the following publicly available documents:

- [enHealth Guidance Statements on per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances](#)
- [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee: Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances \(PFAS\) Factsheet](#)
- [Food Standards Australia New Zealand. Perfluorinated Chemicals in Food. Supporting Document 1: Hazard Assessment Report – PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS. 2017.](#)

In April 2017, the Department of Health announced final health based guidance values for PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS for use in site investigations in Australia. The final health based guidance values were recommended by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) in its report, *Perfluorinated Chemicals in Food*. The health based guidance values were developed by FSANZ at the request of the Department of Health and replace the interim enHealth guidance values released in June 2016.

The new recommended Australian values are closer to the US EPA values although the modelling approach used by FSANZ to derive the value was not the same as that used by the US EPA. FSANZ derived these values independently and its report was peer reviewed by international experts. FSANZ has recommended values that allow for a large margin of safety and are appropriate and protective of public health. Current and future Defence investigations and assessments will adopt the FSANZ guidance values.

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 close proximity to bases currently undertaking detailed environmental investigations. In addition to supplying bottled water, Defence is working with a number of agencies and stakeholders to implement long term management strategies including connecting impacted residents at Williamtown and Oakey to reticulated water and supplying rainwater tanks to eligible Katherine property owners.

The Australian Government has committed \$55 million for affected communities of Williamtown and Oakey to reduce exposure, manage the environmental impacts, and investigate potential health effects of these chemicals. This commitment includes:

Reducing exposure from contaminated drinking water in the investigation areas by providing alternative sources of drinking water.

Providing dedicated mental health and counselling services for the affected communities of Williamtown and Oakey.

Funding an epidemiological study to look at potential health effects, with a focus on the affected communities of Williamstown and Oakey, and help build our knowledge of the effects of these chemicals.

Providing access to blood tests, on a voluntary basis, to people who live or work, or have lived or worked, in the investigation areas at Williamstown and Oakey, in conjunction with the epidemiological study.

Appointing community liaison officers to connect residents with services.

In addition to the above, the Government will provide \$12.5 million over four years from 2017-18 to establish a National Research Program to study the potential effects of exposure of PFAS on human health. The program will be administered by The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the cost of this measure will be met from within the existing resources of the Department of Defence and the Department of Health.

In November 2015, the then Assistant Minister for Defence announced a financial assistance package for individuals and businesses experiencing financial hardship as a result of the NSW Government's decision to temporarily close the Fullerton Cove and Tilligerry Creek fisheries near RAAF Base Williamstown. The package delivered over \$2.2 million in assistance to eligible fishers.

Since early 2016, Defence has engaged with a number of lending institutions, the Australian Property Institute (API), property valuation companies and peak bodies in the sector. This engagement has enabled Defence to share information about Defence's environmental investigation program, and to discuss property lending policies and practices and how valuations are conducted – particularly in the Williamstown and Oakey areas.

While decisions on valuations and lending practices and policies are a matter for individual firms, Defence continues to encourage valuers and lenders to consider what is now known about the pathways for exposure of humans to PFAS, and the implications this may have for decisions on valuations and lending.

The Government has committed to considering further options to assist people in affected areas, including possible land acquisition. Policy decisions will be informed by:

- the final health based guidance values for use in site investigations in Australia;
- outcomes of site investigations; and
- outcomes of human health and ecological risk assessments.

Defence published a Request for Tender through AusTender on 22 June 2017 for a Design Services Consultant for the replacement of the RAAF Base Williamstown Children's Centre, which was closed in late 2016 due to concerns on the exposure of young children to aircraft noise.

Response provided to journalist
13 July 2017

The successful Design Services Consultant will be developing a design for the construction of a new off base Children's Centre Facility at Medowie, NSW, which is approximately 10 km from RAAF Base Williamtown.

Further information on Defence's PFAS Investigation and Management Program can be found at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/ID/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>

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