

Questions:

1. We have spoken to several former RAAF personnel who tell us that during the early and mid 2000s AFFF was used at the base to help clear dust from the runway during dry and windy weather. Firefighters would be called out to coat the runway with foam when the sweepers were ineffective.

Why, when Defence was aware there were issues with the product, was it being used for anything other than essential firefighting?

2. How long was the foam being used in this way? When did the practise stop?

3. We have also been told it was used as a cleaning product to help clean fuel spills. Why was this allowed to happen?

4. Who approved the use of the foam in these non-essential ways and why?

5. Is firefighting foam still used at Williamtown to clear the dust from the runways when sweepers are ineffective?

Response:

There is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects.

Defence uses aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) products to protect human life and assets from emergency Class B fires (flammable liquid fires). With the emergence of concerns about potential environmental impacts of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), many organisations transitioned to alternative products.

From 2004, Defence transitioned from 3M Light Water to Ansulite, for use on the Defence estate. Ansulite does not contain PFOS or PFOA as active ingredients.

Defence uses Ansulite or other suitable Class B foam products in emergency situations where human life is at risk, or in controlled environments to test equipment. Any Ansulite used by Defence in a test environment is captured and treated, and/or disposed of at licensed waste disposal facilities, in accordance with best-practice regulations and standards.

When conducting training exercises, Defence uses training foams which do not contain PFAS, or undertakes simulations without foam discharge.

During the PFAS environmental investigation, a report into the historical use of 3M Light Water at RAAF Base Williamtown was conducted. The AFFF Historical Review states (pg 184):

Response provided to journalist
5 December 2018

There were no reported recollections by the personnel interviewed of the spent AFFF concentrate being used for non-fire related purposes, such as:

- *cleaning agent for vehicles and / or building floors and / or crockery etc.*
- *celebratory occasions. It is noted that discharge of AFFF solution has occurred at other Defence and Non-Defence facilities nationally where there has been a fire fighting presence to celebrate milestones such as:*
 - *marking the introduction of a new aircraft to service.*
 - *dousing of personnel who were promoted or achieved a significant milestone such as 500 hours of flight training.*
 - *celebrating birthdays etc.*

The report can be found at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/Environment/PFAS/docs/Williamtown/Reports/ESARreports/2016ESARReportVolume3.pdf>

Response provided to journalists
4 December 2018