Katherine town water update

The town water supply remains safe to drink as advised by the NT Department of Health and NT Power and Water Corporation. The provision of the interim PFAS water treatment plant is a precautionary measure.

Routine testing by the NT Power and Water Corporation has identified a small number of instances where levels of PFAS have exceeded the Health Based Guidance Values. Despite these spikes, the monthly average continues to remain below the Health Based Guidance Values.

NT and federal health authorities have confirmed that the Katherine town water is safe to drink and that there is minimal risk to human health posed by short-term exceedances of the tolerable daily intake for drinking water.

Water conservation measures recently implemented by the NT Government remain in place. Water conservation measures are in place as demand for water in the Katherine township increases towards the end of the dry season, and reaches maximum demand in approximately October. To meet this demand during these months additional bore water is required. The water conservation measures implemented by the NT Government will directly reduce the reliance on PFAS impacted bore water.

Interim PFAS Water Treatment Plant update

Defence has engaged a water treatment specialist company, ECT2, to provide Katherine with a water treatment plant that filters water to remove PFAS.

The interim PFAS water treatment plant will filter the PFAS impacted bore water removing PFAS before it enters the prime water treatment plant. Once the bore water enters the NT Power and Water Corporation’s water treatment plant it will undergo the normal disinfection process and be mixed with the Katherine River Water.

The interim PFAS water treatment plant uses leading edge technology.

It uses Ion Exchange (IEX) Resin to remove PFAS from water. Details on the treatment and technology can be found on the ECT2 website (www.ect2.com).

The plant arrived in Australia on 25 September 2017 and will commence treating water as part of the commissioning phase in mid October 2017.

Smaller treatment plants of the same technology are in operation at RAAF Base Williamtown and Army Aviation Centre Oakey, and have reduced PFAS content in water to below Limit of Reporting (LOR) levels. The LOR levels are below the FSANZ drinking water screening criteria.

For more information and detailed results visit:

Processing of bore water

The interim PFAS water treatment plant will filter water from the PFAS contaminated bore before it enters the NT Power and Water Corporation’s water treatment plant.

The production rate of the plant will treat the majority of the bore water required for town water production. This process will significantly reduce the PFAS content in the Katherine town water.

Blending process for town water

The Katherine town water supply is usually a mixture of Katherine River water (90%) and bore water (10%).

The interim PFAS water treatment plant will filter PFAS from the bore water before it is blended and disinfected at the NT Power and Water Corporation’s water treatment plant to generate the town water supply.

The interim PFAS plant can treat approximately 1 million litres of bore water, or a megalitre (Ml) per day. This means that the plant can process the majority of the bore water currently required to service the Katherine community. However, this blend will be carefully monitored to ensure that PFAS levels in the Katherine water supply remain below the health based guidance values.

Long-term solutions to managing PFAS

Defence will continue to work with the NT Government to develop interim solutions to minimise the level of PFAS in the town water supply, while longer-term solutions are investigated by the NT Government.

NT Power and Water Corporation is investigating options for long-term solutions for the Katherine town water supply. These include, but are not limited to:

- finding new bore locations in areas where no PFAS has been detected, and
- upgrading infrastructure so there is no need to rely on bore water and upgrading infrastructure to permanently treat bore water to remove PFAS.

These solutions are expected to take some time to develop.

Contact the RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Project Team

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