



RAAF Townsville - Investigation Update

PFAS Investigation and Management Program

Background to the investigation

In March 2017, Defence engaged WSP Australia to conduct a detailed environmental investigation into the presence of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on and in the vicinity of RAAF Base Townsville.

The objective of this environmental investigation is to identify the nature and extent of PFAS in the environment from the use of legacy fire-fighting foam at the Base, and potential risks to people or the environment. The understanding of these potential risks will assist in developing mitigation strategies to minimise exposure.

About per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

Perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS) belong to the PFAS group of chemicals.

Legacy firefighting foams containing PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients were once used extensively worldwide and within Australia because of their effectiveness in fighting liquid fuel fires. PFHxS was also commonly found in the legacy foams as an impurity in the manufacturing process.

In 2004 Defence commenced phasing out its use of legacy firefighting foams containing PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients. The firefighting foam now used by Defence is a more environmentally safe product.

PFAS were also used across Australia and internationally in a range of common household products and specialty applications. As a result, most people living in the developed world will have had some exposure to PFAS.

PFAS are emerging as a concern around the world because they are persistent in the environment.



Common sources of PFAS

Environmental Investigation Activities

All detailed environmental investigations are undertaken by independent environmental services providers in accordance with the National Environmental Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999 (NEPM).

There are three main stages to the investigation:



Investigation Stages

Stage 1: Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI)

The first stage of the investigation, the Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI), has been completed.

The PSI involved the historical review of legacy firefighting use and storage to identify where and when legacy firefighting foam was used (sources), how PFAS moves in the environment (migration pathways) and people, animals and the environment that may be exposed to PFAS (receptors).

The findings of the PSI were used to develop a Conceptual Site Model, to guide understanding of sources of PFAS and their potential pathways to people, animals and the environment and to prioritise works for stage two of the investigation, the Detailed Site Investigation (DSI).

Stage 2: Detailed Site Investigation (DSI)

Sampling for the DSI is currently underway on-base and in the surrounding region. A detailed report will be prepared and shared with relevant government and regulatory bodies as well as the community. The DSI of the investigation expected to be complete in late 2017 or early 2018.





Investigation Area

The Investigation Area defines the current extent of the investigation, focussed on potential human and ecology receptors. This area is expected to contract in areas where delineation is achieved (a pathway between source and receptor is not found), while potentially also expanding in areas where risk is unacceptable.



Map of Investigation Area

Stage 3: Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment

Based on the initial findings conducted for the DSI, Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessments (HHERA) have commenced. The HHERA will evaluate potential risks to the human population and ecology, and inform actions to mitigate risks. The HHERA are expected to be complete and findings released by mid 2018 and will be made available to the public.

Recreational Fishing Survey

To further inform the investigation, a phone survey about recreational fishing will be conducted in the Townsville area in February 2018. The survey will collect information about fishing habits of residents in the Townsville area, including what is caught and eaten.

If you have any questions about the phone survey, or would like to register your interest to participate please contact the RAAF Base Townsville Investigation Project Team (details on the right).

Please note, for your registration in the Recreational Fishing Phone Survey to be valid we need to receive your registration by 22 December 2017. We will require your name, phone number and a suburb in order to contact you to complete the survey.

Government Guidance

The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has released guidance statements relating to human health.

According to enHealth, there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects. However, because these substances persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure is minimised as a precaution.

Further information can be found at the Commonwealth Department of Health has established a PFAS webpage and community hotline.




Phone: 1800 941 180

Web: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/ohp-pfas.htm>

Keeping the community informed

Defence is committed to regularly updating the community throughout the investigation. As well as community information sessions, updates are provided through the project website, direct mail and information sheets as new information becomes available.

Contact the Investigation Project Team

-  1800 842 122
-  Townsville.Defence@wsp.com
-  www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Townsville/

Media enquiries should be directed to Defence Media Operations on (02) 6127 1999 or media@defence.gov.au

