Background to the Investigation

Based on a review of historical information, Defence has determined that a detailed environmental investigation should be conducted at Gingin Satellite Airfield (the Site).

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

The investigation is part of Defence’s review of a number of its properties around Australia that used legacy fire-fighting foams containing perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) as active ingredients. Perfluorohexane Sulfonate (PFHxS) was also commonly found in the legacy foams as an impurity in the manufacturing process.

About per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS belong to a group of chemicals known as PFAS.

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.

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, including in the manufacture of non-stick cookware; fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications; food packaging and in some industrial processes. As a result, most people living in the developed world will have a level of PFAS in their body.

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 experienced environmental services providers in accordance with the National Environmental Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999 (NEPM).

Defence has engaged independent environmental consultant, Jacobs, to conduct the investigation at Gingin.

There are three main stages to an investigation:

- **Stage 1**
  - Preliminary Site Investigation

- **Stage 2**
  - Detailed Site Investigation

- **Stage 3**
  - Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (if required)
Stage1: Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI)

The Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) will be commencing in October 2017. The PSI will involve a review of legacy firefighting foam 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 historical review will be used to develop a Sampling Analysis and Quality Plan (SAQP) that will detail the sampling and testing proposed on and in the vicinity of the Properties.

Water Use Survey

As part of the detailed site investigation, information will be collected through a water use survey to find out more about water use near the Site. The voluntary survey aims to collect information about how bore and surface water is used, and it will help determine if additional sampling needs to be conducted as part of the investigation.

If you would like to complete the water use survey please contact the PFAS Project Team.

Supply of alternative drinking water

As a precaution, Defence is offering to provide alternative drinking water to residents who fulfil certain criteria, within the investigation area surrounding the Site. Please contact the Project Team for further information.

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 PFOS and PFOA 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 PFAS webpage and community hotline:

Phone: 1800 941 180


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 National Information Line

Phone: 1800 365 414


PFASDefenceCoordination@golder.com.au

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