



RAAF Base Wagga Investigation Update Newsletter

PFAS Investigation and Management Program

Investigation update

Defence is undertaking a detailed environmental investigation to understand the nature and extent of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on, and surrounding, RAAF Base Wagga. Detailed site investigations are underway and the project will continue until the end of 2018.

In August 2017, Defence held a community walk-in session to provide the community an update on the investigation. This included discussing the environmental sampling plan and conceptual site model with the community. As part of the investigation, a Water Use Survey was provided to residents in Forest Hill and other areas surrounding the Base. The voluntary survey aims to understand how groundwater and surface water is being used in the area. Around 30 people attended the information session and to date, over 150 completed surveys have been received.

Thank you to everyone who attended the information session and/or completed the Water Use Survey.

The information gathered from the survey and drop in session was used to further refine the sampling plan - and the investigations are now underway.

This newsletter provides a summary of the common questions raised at the drop-in session held in August, and an update on the status of the investigations.

Common Questions

What is the Study Area?

The 'Study Area' is the area where we are sampling soil, surface water, sediment and groundwater in order to understand the extent of PFAS contamination. It has been developed from a review of information on environmental conditions in the area including topography, surface water drainage, hydrogeology and land use.

As more information and sampling data is collected, the Study Area may be modified.

How does PFAS enter and move in the environment?

PFAS can travel in the environment in surface water drainage or groundwater. PFAS takes a long time to break down in the environment and so can be found exceptional distances from their source.

Low Levels of PFAS can be found in the groundwater, surface water and soils in many urban areas as a result of their widespread use, including in everyday household products.

Higher levels of PFAS have been found in soil, surface water and ground water as a result of legacy fire-fighting foams being used in the past. Fire-fighting training locations such as Defence bases are one area where higher concentrations have been found.

How can people be exposed to PFAS?

Exposure to PFAS can occur from food, water (ground and surface water), through contact due to work environment and various consumer products.

At locations where PFAS contamination has been identified at higher levels, the main way people can be exposed is by drinking contaminated bore water or surface water. Other ways include eating home grown produce where contaminated water has been used (such as eggs, milk, meat, fruit or vegetables) or eating seafood caught in affected areas.

How can PFAS affect people's health?

The Department of Health states that there is no consistent evidence PFAS cause any adverse human health affects. However, since these chemicals remain in humans and the environment for many years, the Department of Health recommends that as a precaution human exposure to PFAS be minimised.

More information on health guidance for PFAS is available at www.health.gov.au/PFAS

What about run-off storm water from the base?

Surface water sampling is occurring as part of the investigation including sampling from storm water drainage channels at the Base as well as areas surrounding the Base potentially impacted by storm water run-off.



Drill rig used to install groundwater bores





Preliminary Site Investigations
March 2016



Preparing draft sampling plan
April 2017 – July 2017

Reviewing available information and developing sampling plan and conceptual model for detailed site investigations



Community water use survey
July 2017 – August 2017

To understand how the surrounding community uses groundwater and surface water



Community information session
August 2017

To discuss draft sampling plan and conceptual site model and provide an opportunity for community to complete water use survey in person



Detailed site investigations
September 2017 – January 2018

Sampling groundwater, soil, sediment and surface water

WE ARE
HERE



Community information session
March 2018

To present detailed site investigation results



Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment
March 2018 – June 2018

To evaluate potential risks to the community and ecology, and inform future actions to manage risks



Community information session
June 2018

To present the results of the Human Health Risk Assessment and Ecological Risk Assessment



Strategic Management Plan
June 2018 – September 2018

Developing a plan for managing risks identified from the risk assessment



Community information session
September 2018

To present the strategic management plan

***Dates may be subject to rescheduling.**

What are the next steps?

Environmental sampling is underway and expected to be completed in January 2018.

Defence expects to hold the next community information session in March 2018 to present and discuss the sampling results.

An assessment of the sampling results will be conducted in the form of a Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment to understand any potential PFAS exposure pathways to people and the environment. The results of this risk assessment will assist with developing a plan to manage risks and/or remediation.

Further community sessions will be held later in 2018 to discuss the results of the risk assessment as well as the management actions Defence will take to control these risks.

Keeping the community informed

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

Contact

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