



## State-wide PFAS investigation program

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is leading an investigation into sites across NSW where significant quantities of PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) have been used. The EPA wants to better understand the extent of PFAS use and any resulting contamination in NSW. This will ensure the EPA is prepared if any health and environmental impacts become known.

### What is PFAS?

PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) is a group of manufactured chemicals that includes perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS).

Due to their fire retardant, waterproofing and stain-resistant qualities, these chemicals have been widely used in many industrial and consumer products worldwide. PFAS can be found in food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing, and some types of fire-fighting foam.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that bioaccumulate, do not easily break down, and can persist for a long time in the environment. They are being phased out around the world.

### Is PFAS a health risk?

PFAS are an emerging contaminant, with international research yet to fully determine any human health effects related to exposure.

The Commonwealth Department of Health advises there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects. However, based on the evidence from animal studies, potential adverse health effects cannot be excluded.

Much of the existing research on humans has been undertaken with people who were exposed to high levels of PFAS through their work. These studies looked for effects on cholesterol levels, male hormones, heart disease, liver changes and other effects, including cancer. These studies have not consistently shown that PFAS exposure is linked to health problems.

A factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health is available from the Commonwealth Department of Health website at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).

### How are people exposed to PFAS?

Due to their widespread use in everyday and specialty products, almost everyone is exposed to low levels of PFAS from food, water, and various consumer products. Specific contamination can lead to higher exposures through contaminated food,

especially seafood, or affected drinking water.

### **What is the likely risk?**

The presence of PFAS in the environment does not necessarily mean there is a health risk. It is also important to assess if there are pathways through which you might be exposed to PFAS.

### **Are these chemicals still in use?**

While many essential uses of PFAS are still permitted, there are efforts both nationally and internationally to restrict non-essential uses and reduce use of the most hazardous PFAS compounds as a precautionary measure. Certain chemicals containing PFAS are still in use in industries such as metal plating. The National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) is monitoring their use in Australia.

### **Why is the EPA investigating PFAS in NSW?**

The EPA wants to better understand the extent of PFAS use and any resulting contamination in NSW. This will ensure the EPA is better prepared if any health and environmental impacts become known.

### **Where is the EPA investigating?**

PFAS are widespread in the environment in low concentrations, due to their use in a wide range of products and their persistent nature.

As a result, the EPA is investigating sites where the greatest usage of PFAS-containing products has taken place, including firefighting training facilities, airports and some industrial sites.

The EPA is assessing whether there are exposure pathways that may increase people's contact with the chemicals from

these sites, such as bore water usage, surface water usage or fishing.

### **How is the investigation being undertaken?**

The EPA will work with occupiers and owners of identified sites to collect samples of soils and/or waters for indicative analysis for PFAS, and to identify potential exposure pathways. The initial investigation program is expected to take some months to complete.

If significant PFAS concentrations levels are detected at a specific location and exposure pathways are identified, a more detailed assessment will be undertaken, and then clean-up will occur.

The outcome of the investigations will be made public when it is available.

### **What is the NSW Government's role?**

The NSW Government is committed to working closely with all stakeholders, to ensure an appropriate, scientific and risk-based approach is adopted throughout the investigation.

The EPA is working with other agencies including Department of Primary Industries, NSW Health, and NSW Food Authority to ensure investigations are suitable and timely, closely monitoring results and keeping the community informed, across NSW.

### **Where can I find more information?**

More information on PFAS is available at [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/MediaInformation/pfa\\_sinvestigation.htm](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/MediaInformation/pfa_sinvestigation.htm).

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the NSW Environment Line on **131 555**.