

# Holsworthy Barracks: PFAS Investigations

## Update for local residents

### Key points

- The Department of Defence is investigating potential per-and-poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination stemming from the historical use of fire-fighting foams at the Holsworthy Barracks and Liverpool Fire Station, which was formerly operated by the Department of Defence.
- Investigations have found PFAS both on and off site at the Holsworthy Barracks and Liverpool Fire Station.
- The potential for exposure to PFAS appears limited as surface and groundwater use appears minimal in the area.
- Defence will conduct a Human Health Risk Assessment and an Ecological Risk Assessment which will help assess potential risks to human health and the environment.

### What are PFAS?

PFAS are a group of manufactured chemicals that include perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS).

Due to their fire retardant, waterproofing and stain resistant qualities, these chemicals were widely used in some types of fire-fighting foams and other industrial products worldwide. PFAS can also be found in low concentrations in many consumer products like food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing and shampoo.

The most common and prevalent sources of PFAS in the environment is where fire-fighting foams were used for training purposes, particularly on

Department of Defence bases and at fire-fighting training facilities.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that do not easily break down and can persist in the environment.

Products containing PFAS are being phased out around the world.

### Are PFAS a health risk?

The Australian Government's PFAS Expert Health Panel, in its report to the Federal Minister for Health, noted there is no current evidence to suggest an increase in overall health risk related to PFAS exposure. However, the Expert Panel also said health effects cannot be ruled out at this time.

Because the risks are not fully known, the NSW Government takes a precautionary approach to limiting people's exposure to PFAS. This includes occasionally providing precautionary advice to help limit people's exposure to PFAS. The EPA is leading the PFAS Investigation Program to understand the prevalence of this emerging contaminant in NSW. This program will help NSW be better prepared to respond if any health and environmental impacts become known.

The Expert Panel's report and a factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health is available at [www.health.gov.au/pfas](http://www.health.gov.au/pfas).

### Why is testing being undertaken at Holsworthy Barracks?

The Department of Defence is conducting PFAS investigations at locations across Australia where there has been significant historical use of PFAS-containing fire-fighting foams. These investigations are looking at the extent of the impact of PFAS, and the potential risks to the community. PFAS foams were used at the Holsworthy Barracks and Liverpool Fire Station in fire-fighting training and operations prior to the foams being phased out.

### What is known so far?

Investigations have found PFAS both on and offsite at the Holsworthy Barracks and Liverpool Fire Station.

The detection of PFAS is not unexpected given the past use of PFAS-containing fire-fighting foams at the site. PFAS has also been used in many

domestic and industrial products and background levels may be present from these other sources.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the 24/7 NSW Environment Line on **131 555**

### **Do residents need to do anything?**

Finding PFAS in the environment does not mean there is a human health risk. It is important to assess if there are exposure pathways through which people might ingest PFAS, such as drinking contaminated ground water or consuming food products watered with contaminated ground water. The potential for exposure to PFAS appears limited as surface and ground water use appears minimal in the area.

Regardless of PFAS detections, NSW Health recommends that people do not use groundwater for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene (including cleaning teeth and bathing) without testing and appropriate treatment.

### **What are the next steps?**

The Department of Defence will conduct a Human Health Risk Assessment and an Ecological Risk Assessment. This further testing will determine whether there are any potential risks to human health or the environment, and whether any precautionary advice might be required.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) expects the results will be available in early 2019 for review by the NSW PFAS Taskforce.

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

Although the NSW Government does not regulate Department of Defence sites, they have agreed to conduct investigations in a manner consistent with the EPA's requirements.

The NSW Government is committed to working with the Department of Defence to ensure timely and robust investigations are undertaken.

This collaboration ensures an appropriate, scientific and risk-based approach to protect the environment and community.

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

More information, including detailed investigation reports, can be found on the Department of Defence website at

**<http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/>**

More information on the NSW Government's response to PFAS can be found at

**[www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas)**.

