

Londonderry TestSafe: PFAS Investigations

Update for local residents

Key points

- TestSafe has been investigating potential per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination stemming from the historical use of firefighting foams at its Londonderry site.
- Investigations have found PFAS on- and off-site, including in Rickabys Creek and Rickabys Creek Tributary.
- A risk assessment has been undertaken based on the results of monitoring in the creek system. The findings have been provided to residents downstream of the Testsafe facility, who are affected, along with instructions about the use of creek water.
- TestSafe is continuing remediation to reduce the amount of PFAS leaving the site. This has included the construction of a lined retention pond onsite to capture any surface water from the PFAS-impacted fire-fighting training ground. This captured surface water is treated for PFAS. Ongoing monitoring to assess the effectiveness of the remediation actions continues.

Why is PFAS testing being undertaken at Londonderry?

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is conducting PFAS investigations at locations across NSW 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 Londonderry site during fire-fighting training and fire extinguisher testing prior to the foams being phased out.

What is known so far?

Investigations at the Londonderry site have identified PFAS both on- and off-site.

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.

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.

Based on a risk assessment undertaken using the results of numerous monitoring events in Rickabys Creek and its tributary, the EPA has notified some residents living downstream with advice to avoid potential risks associated with the use of creek water.

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

What are the next steps?

TestSafe will continue to work on remediation activities at its site to reduce the likelihood of additional PFAS entering the environment. This has included the construction of a lined retention basin which collects water runoff at the site. A sampling program is also in place to monitor the effectiveness of these ongoing remediation activities.

The EPA will oversee TestSafe throughout the investigation and remediation process and ensure the community is kept informed of any developments.

What are PFAS?

The release of PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) into the environment is an emerging global concern. 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?

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

The Australian Government's PFAS Expert Health Panel recommends limiting exposure to PFAS as a precaution until further research into health effects is completed.

Expert advice released by the Australian Government in June 2019 states PFAS has not been shown to cause disease in humans and "probably has minimal impact on human health".

However, the advice cautions that PFAS exposure may be associated with mildly elevated cholesterol levels, effects on some hormone levels and on kidney function ¹.

Finding PFAS in the environment does not mean there is a human health risk. The NSW Government adopts a precautionary approach to limit people's exposure to PFAS.

Typically, this approach means assessing and minimising human exposure pathways, such as limiting groundwater use or consumption (if used) or seafood consumption where threshold levels of PFAS is present.

What is the State Government's role?

The EPA is working closely with the PFAS Technical Advisory Group, which includes members from NSW Department of Primary Industries, NSW Health and NSW Food Authority, to ensure timely and robust investigations are undertaken across the State.

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

Where can I find more information?

More information on the NSW Government's response to PFAS can be found at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas.

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

¹ The 2019 enHealth Guidance Statements and a factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health effects by the Department of Health is available at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas.htm#enHealth>