

Tamworth Regional Airport: PFAS investigations

Update for local residents

Key points

- Tamworth Regional Council is investigating potential per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination stemming from the historical use of fire-fighting foams at the Tamworth Regional Airport.
- Investigations have found PFAS on the Tamworth Regional Airport site. PFAS was also detected in soil, sediments, groundwater and surface water in some surrounding properties.
- Residents of surrounding properties have been supplied with tailored precautionary dietary advice. This advice does not apply to the wider Tamworth community.

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.

Why is testing being undertaken at Tamworth Regional Airport?

PFAS investigations are being undertaken 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 Tamworth Regional Airport in fire-fighting training and operations prior to the foams being phased out.

Over the years, Tamworth Regional Council have leased the airport site to a range of organisations for fire-fighting training activities. While investigations of this sort are usually undertaken by the polluter, Tamworth Regional Council are leading this work because of the range of organisations that have used the site in the past.

What is known so far?

Investigations have found PFAS on the Tamworth Regional Airport site. PFAS was also detected in

soil, sediments, surface and ground water at surrounding properties.

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.

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**.

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.

Following a water use survey, residents of surrounding properties have been provided with tailored precautionary dietary advice to minimise their exposure to PFAS. This advice is specific to those properties and does not apply to the wider Tamworth community.

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 NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) will continue to work collaboratively with Tamworth Regional Council to ensure timely and robust investigations are undertaken. The EPA and Tamworth Regional Council will keep the community informed of any developments.

What is the NSW Government's role?

The EPA is working closely with Tamworth Regional Council, NSW Department of Primary Industries, NSW Health and NSW Food Authority 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 can be found on the Tamworth Regional Council website at **<http://www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au/Environment/Satewide-PFAS-Investigation/Tamworth-Regional-Airport--PFAS-investigations>**

