www.airservicesaustralia.com

Hobart Airport and fire fighting foam

Airservices role at Hobart Airport

Airservices Australia is a government-owned organisation that was established in 1995 to provide air navigation and aviation rescue fire fighting services (ARFFS).

Airservices has provided these life-saving rescue and fire fighting services at Hobart Airport since 1995. Prior to that, they were provided by former Commonwealth agencies which go back to the 1950s. Fire training for both Hobart and Launceston is conducted at the Hobart Airport Fire Training Ground with fire fighters using water rather than foam for these exercises.

Use of fire fighting foam at Hobart Airport

Airservices does not use fire fighting foam containing per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at Hobart Airport nor at any other civil airport in Australia.

Airservices began transitioning away from these foams in the early 2000s when concerns first started to emerge about the possible environmental impacts of these chemicals. Airservices has been using PFAS-free fire fighting foam since 2010.

From the early 1980s until the early 2000s, a fire fighting foam called 3M Lightwater was used by various industries around the world. This Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) was particularly effective for fighting liquid fuel fires and was widely adopted both in Australia and around the world. This product contained perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) as an active ingredient and other PFAS, such as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). In the early 2000s, following concerns that started to emerge about the possible environmental effects of PFAS, Airservices made the decision to change its fire fighting foam to a product called Ansulite which was thought to not contain PFOS. It was later found to contain trace amounts of these chemicals. Since 2010, Airservices has a PFAS-free foam, Solberg RF6 at all civilian airports where it operates.

What action has Airservices taken at Hobart Airport?

Transition of foam and testing

The first action was to stop using foams containing these chemicals which commenced in the early 2000s with a transition to Ansulite, and then a comprehensive roll-out of Solberg, a PFAS-free foam, completed in 2010.

Airservices then began testing and monitoring for these chemicals in 2008 with testing at the Fire Training Ground (FTG) confirming these chemicals in soil and groundwater at the FTG.

Investigations and characterisation

In 2016, Airservices commenced a Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) for PFAS contamination across the entire airport to better understand potential impacts from the previous use of these legacy foams. This included limited sampling.

This is the process which Airservices is undertaking at all its sites as part of a National PFAS Management Program.

PSI results

The PSI found historic PFAS contamination on airport. This was expected given the previous use of fire fighting foams containing PFAS at Airservices sites at the airport. A low level of PFAS was also detected offsite to the north-east of the airport in surface water at Sinclair Creek. This led to Airservices initiating a targeted water quality and ecological sampling of the area.

TasWater has advised that it does not have any drinking water catchments near Hobart Airport and water from its reticulated system remains safe to drink.
Key results of the PSI and targeted water sampling include:

- the risk to water users offsite is low;
- the risk to recreational users, such as swimmers, off the Five Mile Beach area is low;
- no PFAS detected in wild oysters at Five Mile Beach; and
- low risk to airport workers and people on adjacent land.

Airservices has shared the results with Hobart Airport, EPA Tasmania, and the Commonwealth regulator - Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (DIRDC) to determine appropriate next steps. Airservices has also briefed the Hobart Airport Community Aviation Consultation Group and other stakeholders around the airport on its investigations.

Dedicated research and development

Airservices is focused on identifying practical remediation and containment solution. A trial waste water treatment facility has been installed at the airport fire training ground and commenced operations earlier this month. This trial aims to remove any historic PFAS contamination from any wastewater that may come from the fire training ground.

Next steps

While the testing results indicate low risk to the community surrounding the airport, Airservices will continue to work with Hobart Airport and relevant agencies to determine appropriate next steps. This work includes the finalisation of a PFAS management plan, which will include a range of practical actions to address PFAS concerns such as groundwater monitoring and surface water monitoring, and assessment of the practicality of removing PFAS impacted soil stockpiles. Airservices is currently finalising this plan in consultation with Hobart Airport.

More information

Airservices will continue to keep the community informed and has published copy of the latest reports in relation to Hobart Airport on Airservices Australia website:
https://www.airservicesaustralia.com/community/environment/pfas/

To speak to a member of the Airservices project team email:
pfascomms@AirservicesAustralia.com

All media enquiries to Airservices will be directed to the Airservices media team on 1300 619 341 or media@airservicesaustralia.com.

For health related enquires on PFAS, advice should be sought from the Commonwealth Department of Health www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas.htm

EPA Tasmania - PFAS Contamination: http://epa.tas.gov.au/regulation/contaminated-sites/identification-and-assessment-of-contaminated-land/contaminated-land-issues/pfas-contamination