

Canberra Airport and fire fighting foam

Airservices role at Canberra Airport

Canberra Airport is a Commonwealth airport, federally-regulated by the Commonwealth Government Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (DIRDC). Airservices Australia is a Commonwealth Government-owned organisation established in 1995 to provide life-saving air navigation and aviation rescue fire fighting services (ARFFS) at civilian airports, including Canberra Airport. Before 1995, other Commonwealth agencies provided ARFFS at Canberra Airport, since the early 1960s.

Use of fire fighting foam at Canberra Airport

Airservices does not use fire fighting foam containing per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) for fire fighting, or training, at Canberra Airport, nor at any other civil airport in Australia. Airservices began transitioning away from these foams in the early 2000s, when concerns began to emerge about the possible environmental impacts of these chemicals. Airservices has used PFAS-free fire fighting foam at Canberra Airport since 2010.

Various industries around the world used a PFAS-containing foam called 3M Light Water, from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, for its effectiveness in fighting liquid fuel fires. This product contained active ingredient perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), and other PFAS, such as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). In the early 2000s, as concerns emerged about the possible environmental effects of PFAS, Airservices changed to a fire fighting foam called Ansulite. Initially understood not to contain PFOS, Ansulite was later found to contain trace amounts. Since 2010, Airservices has used a PFAS-free foam Solberg RF6 at all civil airports where it operates.

What action has Airservices taken at Canberra Airport?

Airservices is taking a proactive and evidenced-based approach to managing PFAS contamination arising from the historical, or legacy-use, of fire fighting foam containing PFAS, at its leasehold sites.

- **Foam transition and testing**

Airservices has stopped using foams containing these chemicals. Airservices has been testing and monitoring for these chemicals, since 2008. Testing at the Fire Training Ground (FTG) confirmed these chemicals in soil and groundwater at the FTG.

- **Investigation and characterisation**

Airservices engaged independent environmental consultancy AECOM Australia Pty Ltd (AECOM) to undertake a Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) and limited sampling program at Canberra Airport, in 2016, to better understand potential impacts from Airservices previous use of these foams. Individual airport PSIs are part of Airservices' National PFAS Management Program. Sampling at the Canberra Airport PSI focused on areas historically used for Airservices ARFFS.

PSI Results

The PSI detected PFAS on airport in close proximity to the leased sites where Airservices carried out its fire service activities prior to 2010, when it transitioned to a PFAS-free foam. The PSI concluded that the risk to public areas surrounding the airport is low. It notes further investigation is required on-airport.

Airservices has shared the results with the airport operator, Canberra Airport Group (CAG); the Commonwealth Government site regulator, the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (DIRDC); the offsite environmental regulator, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Environment Protection Authority (ACT EPA).

Airservices will undertake further investigations, in consultation with CAG, DIRDC and various Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government agencies, and community.

Water

There is no evidence to indicate PFAS has migrated from Airservices leased sites to the western boundary of the airport. Airservices notes the local area is connected to mains drinking water.

Dedicated research and development

Airservices is identifying practical remediation and containment solutions to legacy PFAS contamination, with various treatment and technology trials underway at sites nationwide. Airservices intends to implement successful technologies at Canberra Airport, where effective, practical and appropriate.

Next steps

Whilst the PSI report indicates a low risk, Airservices will undertake further targeted investigations to further characterise PFAS impacts from its leased sites. Airservices is also developing a PFAS Management Plan. Airservices has been, and remains, committed to working with CAG, and Commonwealth and state agencies, as part of a collaborative effort to identify and address PFAS contamination at Canberra Airport.

More information

Airservices will continue to keep the community informed about its work at Canberra Airport. Airservices has published a copy of its latest investigation reports in relation to Canberra Airport on its website:

- The PSI is published here <https://www.airservicesaustralia.com/community/environment/pfas/>
- For PFAS queries please e-mail the Airservices project team: pfascomms@airservicesaustralia.com
- For media enquiries please contact the Airservices media team on 1300 619 341 or media@airservicesaustralia.com
- For PFAS health related enquiries, please consult the Commonwealth Department of Health website: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas.htm>
- The Commonwealth PFAS website: <https://www.pfas.gov.au/>
- For information about PFAS contamination in the ACT: <https://www.pfas.gov.au/advice>