

Adelaide Airport and fire fighting foam

Airservices role at Adelaide 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 Adelaide Airport since 1995. Prior to that, they were provided by former Commonwealth agencies dating back to the 1950s. Fire training is also conducted at Adelaide Airport.

Use of fire fighting foam at Adelaide Airport

Airservices does not use fire fighting foam containing per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at Adelaide 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 Adelaide 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 in close proximity to where firefighting activities were carried out at the airport. This was expected given the previous use of fire fighting foams containing PFAS at Airservices sites at the airport. Results were generally low in areas away from sites where historic training took place. Following the PSI, further targeted sampling was conducted which indicated a higher level of PFAS at the western boundary of the airport and

Airservices is now undertaking further investigations. SA Water has advised that this area is not a catchment area for drinking water and the mains drinking water is not affected.

Airservices is working closely with Adelaide Airport, the South Australian Environmental Protection Authority (SA EPA) and SA Health including sharing all testing results. Airservices has also consulted the community through the Adelaide Airport Community Aviation Consultation Group (CACG).

Dedicated research and development

Airservices is focused on identifying practical remediation and containment solution. A trial stormwater treatment facility is currently in the planning phase. This treatment facility aims to remove any historic PFAS contamination from any stormwater that may come from the fire station.

Next steps

Airservices is now undertaking further investigations including targeted groundwater sampling from public land adjacent to the western boundary of the airport, stormwater testing, and a targeted survey of bore water usage.

Airservices will continue to work with relevant Commonwealth and State environmental and health regulators and Adelaide Airport, as part of an evidence led and risk-based approach to responsibly managing PFAS concerns at Adelaide Airport. This will include a range of practical actions to address PFAS concerns such as groundwater monitoring and surface water monitoring. Airservices is also currently in the planning stage to implement a stormwater treatment trial at the airport in 2019 which will aim to reduce the amount of any historic PFAS contamination impacting stormwater in relation to its leased sites.

More information

Airservices will continue to keep the community informed and has published copy of the latest reports in relation to Adelaide 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 should be directed to the Airservices media team on 1300 619 341 or media@airservicesaustralia.com.

A copy of the report can be found at the Airservices Australia website:

<https://www.airservicesaustralia.com/community/environment/pfas/>

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

PFAS information is available for the Commonwealth PFAS website - <https://www.pfas.gov.au/>

SA Health advice on bore water use can be found on the SA Health website:

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/public+health/water+quality/bore+water/bore+water>