

Alice Springs Airport and fire fighting foam

Airservices' role at Alice Springs Airport

Airservices Australia is a Commonwealth Government-owned organisation established in 1995 to provide air navigation and aviation rescue fire fighting (ARFF) services. Airservices has provided the life-saving rescue and fire fighting services at Alice Springs Airport since 1995. Prior to 1995, various other Commonwealth agencies provided these services at Alice Springs Airport.

Fire fighting foams and their use at Alice Springs Airport

Fire fighting foams of a type called aqueous film forming foams (AFFF), containing per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS), have been used around the world, for extinguishing liquid fuel fires, since the 1970s. The most commonly-used PFAS-containing AFFF, 3M LightWater, was particularly effective and widely-adopted, in Australia and globally. It contained perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), as an active ingredient, and other PFAS such as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

In the early 2000s, as concerns emerged about the possible environmental effects of PFOS, Airservices changed from 3M LightWater to another AFFF called Ansulite, understood to contain neither PFOS nor PFOA. But, increasing concerns about the environmental impacts of all PFAS prompted Airservices, later, to change to a PFAS-free fire fighting foam. Since 2010, Airservices has carried the PFAS-free fire fighting foam Solberg RF6 at all civilian airports where it operates, including Alice Springs Airport.

What action has Airservices taken at Alice Springs Airport?

Airservices is taking a proactive and evidence-based approach to managing PFAS contamination arising from legacy use of fire fighting foams containing PFAS, at its leasehold sites, on Alice Springs Airport:

- **Foam transition and testing**

Airservices stopped using foams containing PFAS in 2010. Airservices has been monitoring for these chemicals, since 2008.

- **Investigation and characterisation**

Individual airport Preliminary Site Investigations (PSIs) into PFAS contamination are part of Airservices' National PFAS Management Program. PSIs include a review of available site history and previous sampling results, site inspections and site interviews, along with a limited sampling program.

In late 2016, Airservices engaged independent consultancy GHD Pty Ltd to undertake a PSI with a limited sampling program at Alice Springs Airport. The aim of the PSI was to better understand potential impacts from Airservices previous use of PFAS-containing foams, in Airservices-managed areas, since 1995.

The PSI identified the main PFAS source areas as the Fire Training Ground (FTG), including surrounding soil piles, and the Main Fire Station (MFS). There were some elevated PFAS detections in soils at the FTG. The PSI recommends a management strategy for these soils. The PSI also detected PFAS in the surface water. Airservices notes however, there is limited potential for surface water to migrate offsite.

▪ **Consultation**

Airservices has engaged with the airport operator, Northern Territory Airports (NTA) Pty Ltd; the onsite regulator, the federal Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (DIRDC); and, the offsite regulator, the NT Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Airservices has also briefed the Alice Springs Airport Community Aviation Consultation Group on the PSI findings.

Next steps

Airservices will continue to monitor PFAS at its sites on-airport, in liaison with NT Airports and the environmental regulators. Airservices is developing a soil management strategy to manage the elevated PFAS levels in soils at ARFFS sites. Airservices is also researching practical management solutions for legacy PFAS contamination. Various treatment and technology trials are underway at sites nationwide. Airservices intends to implement successful technologies, where effective, practical and appropriate.

Airservices will continue to engage with NTA, DIRDC and NT EPA on these matters.

More information

- For media enquiries, please call 1300 619 341 or e-mail media@airservicesaustralia.com
- For PFAS enquiries please e-mail the Airservices project team: pfascomms@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>
- For more information about how the Northern Territory government is managing PFAS, please visit the NT EPA website: <https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/waste-pollution/compliance/pfas-investigation>