

Port Hedland International Airport and firefighting foam

Airservices role at Port Hedland International Airport

Airservices Australia (Airservices) is a Commonwealth Government entity established in 1995 to provide air navigation and aviation rescue firefighting (ARFF) services. Airservices provided ARFFS at Port Hedland International Airport from 1995 until 2003 and again from 2013. At other times, various other agencies provided these services for Port Hedland.

Use of firefighting foam at Port Hedland International Airport

Airservices does not currently use firefighting foam containing per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at Port Hedland International Airport nor at any other airport in Australia. Airservices began transitioning away from these foams in the 2000s when concerns first started to emerge about the possible environmental impacts of these chemicals. Airservices has been using PFAS-free firefighting foam since 2010.

From the early 1980s until the early 2000s, a firefighting foam called 3M Lightwater was widely used by various industries in Australia and worldwide, as the foam was particularly effective for fighting liquid fuel fires. This product contained perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) as an active ingredient and other perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), such as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). Since 2010, Airservices has used a PFAS-free foam, Solberg RF6, at all civilian airports where it operates, including at Port Hedland International Airport.

What action has Airservices taken at Port Hedland International Airport?

Airservices is taking a proactive and evidence-based approach to managing PFAS contamination arising from legacy use of firefighting foams containing PFAS on its leasehold sites:

- **Foam transition and testing**

Airservices transitioned to PFAS-free foam Solberg RF6 at all its civilian airports in 2010.

- **Investigation and characterisation**

In 2016, Airservices commissioned an independent consultant AECOM Australia Pty Ltd (AECOM) to undertake the Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) at Port Hedland International Airport as part of Airservices' National PFAS Management Program, to better understand the potential use of and impacts from previous use of AFFFs at Port Hedland Airport. It comprised reviews of available information, previous sampling results, inspections and interviews with Airservices and airport personnel, and limited sampling.

- **Summary PSI analysis:**

The PSI findings for Port Hedland International Airport indicates multiple locations have, or may have been, affected by historical AFFF use.

The investigation indicated that PFAS levels for soil and sediment did not exceed the adopted human health assessment criteria where collected. PFAS levels for the soil and sediment at one location near the current fire station exceeded the adopted ecological assessment criteria.

Results also showed that PFAS impacts exceeded the adopted human health and ecological criteria in groundwater and surface water in the samples collected, including the north east Airport boundary.

- **Consultation**

Airservices has engaged key stakeholders about its PFAS investigation at Port Hedland International Airport including the airport operator, the Town of Port Hedland and the State environmental regulator, Western Australia Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (WA DWER). Airservices is committed to work collaboratively with key stakeholders to address and manage potential PFAS contamination arising from legacy AFFF-use at Port Hedland International Airport.

- **Next steps**

Based on findings from the PSI, Airservices is undertaking a further Targeted Site Investigation to better understand the presence of PFAS, and any potential migration pathways and exposure risks.

Airservices intends to implement reasonable and practicable measures where available to manage or reduce PFAS impacts. Airservices will continue to engage key stakeholders about its work to investigate, monitor and, where necessary, manage PFAS contamination arising from Airservices' legacy AFFF-use at Port Hedland International Airport.

More information

- The Port Hedland International Airport PSI is available on the Airservices' website: <https://www.airservicesaustralia.com/community/environment/pfas/>
- For media enquiries, please call 1300 619 341 or e-mail media@airservicesaustralia.com
- For PFAS enquiries please e-mail: 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 PFAS in WA, please visit the WA DWER website: <https://www.der.wa.gov.au/our-work/community-updates/416-pfas-investigations-in-western-australia>
- The WA Government Statement on PFAS is available here: https://www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/our-work/community-updates/PFAS/WA_Government_Statement_PFAS.pdf