

Frequently Asked Questions



Q. What is PFAS?

PFAS is an abbreviation for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. There are many types of PFAS, with the most commonly known being perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS).

These manufactured chemicals are very stable, meaning they don't break down easily and can accumulate in the environment. PFAS makes products non-stick, water-repellent, and weather and stain-resistant. It has typically been used in industrial uses such as fire-fighting foams, chrome / metal plating, food packaging, textiles, paper / pulp production and stain repellents.

There is currently some uncertainty in relation to the extent to which exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects, but it is recommended that humans minimise their exposure to PFAS. Studies on animals have identified negative effects on reproductive, developmental and other systems.

Q: Why is PFAS contamination a particular issue for airports?

Services undertaken by Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) at most - if not all - major Australian airports, including Sydney Airport, involved the use of Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) products. Particular AFFF products likely to have been used include '3M Lightwater' and 'Ansulite', both of which each contained PFAS.

Q. Is Sydney Airport impacted by PFAS? Where did it come from?

The main source of PFAS at airport sites is firefighting foams. Airservices Australia has advised that PFAS has not been used in its firefighting foams at Sydney Airport since 2010.

Deluge systems for hangars and bulk fuel storage are also known to contain PFAS-containing products.

Due to the widespread use of PFAS across a number of industrial applications, the airport site may also be impacted from PFAS originating from off-site sources that are migrating on to the airport.

Q. What is Sydney Airport doing about PFAS?

Environmental monitoring has identified the presence of PFAS contamination at the airport. Sydney Airport is undertaking ongoing environmental investigations to manage and better understand the extent of that contamination.

To protect workers and the environment, Sydney Airport engages with specialists and the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities to investigate soil and groundwater before construction projects are commenced.

Sydney Airport is working with airport tenants to phase out the use of the AFFF containing PFAS at the airport and is liaising closely with the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities and other relevant authorities in relation to the management of PFAS contamination from AFFF use at the airport.