

## Background

- PFAS are per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, a group of over 4000 chemicals.
- PFAS chemicals have been used around the world since the 1950s, most commonly in non-stick cookware, stain-resistant fabric, some cosmetics and some firefighting foams.
- While there is no conclusive evidence PFAS causes any specific illness in people, concern has been raised due to its persistence in the environment.
- They have been used in some firefighting foams, non-stick cookware, stain-resistant fabrics and carpets, some cosmetics, and products that resist grease, water, and oil.
- People are exposed to small amounts of some PFAS in everyday life, through food, dust, air, water and contact with consumer products that contain these compounds.
- Most people will have a detectable level of PFAS in their bodies but there is no consistent evidence of any specific health risk.
- The release of PFAS into the environment has become a concern because these chemicals do not break down easily by any natural process, so they can persist in humans, animals and the environment.
- Firefighting foams that contained PFAS have been phased out by ACT Fire & Rescue since September 2004. It was completely withdrawn from service in April 2005.
- Governments across Australia are recommending that people reduce their exposure to PFAS wherever possible, as a precaution, while further research on the potential human health effects continues.

## Effects on health

- Worldwide, there is currently no conclusive evidence PFAS causes any specific illness in people. Research into potential human health effects is ongoing.
- Health guidance is based on the amount of PFAS in food or drinking water that a person can consume daily over a lifetime.
- The main exposure to PFAS is through drinking PFAS-contaminated water. Exposure can also occur through eating contaminated food.
- The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) recommends, as a precaution, that exposure to PFAS be minimised whenever possible whilst further research is undertaken on the potential health effects of PFAS exposure.
- The precautionary advice provided by enHealth takes into account the uncertainties in the current scientific evidence and the ability of these chemicals to persist in humans and in the environment.
- The ACT Health Protection Service is represented on enHealth to ensure that Canberrans are provided with the most up to date health advice on PFAS.

## **PFAS detection at the former Charnwood Fire Station**

- The former Charnwood fire station is now privately owned.
- A development application for a childcare centre was approved on the condition that requirements of the Health Protection Service and the EPA, as they relate to contamination assessment and management, were met.
- The Health Protection Service and the EPA both supported the protection measures recommended by the environmental consultant and required that the builder satisfy these recommendations before the building and surrounding grounds could receive a certificate of occupancy and be used.
- An environmental consultant confirmed to the Health Protection Service and the EPA that the recommended protection measures had been successfully installed, protecting any users of the site from any remnant contaminants.

## **Off-site impacts from the former Charnwood Fire Station**

- In accordance the *Environment Protection Act 1997* the EPA has required that the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) undertake a contaminated land site assessment of potential off-site PFAS impacts from the former Fire Station.
- This assessment will determine the level PFAS impact on the St Thomas Aquinas Primary School site, the Ginninderra Christian Church site and other surrounding land including road verges and other public land.
- The EPA has required that the ESA engage a suitably qualified environmental consultant, specialising in contaminated land assessments, to undertake the site assessment. The site assessment will involve accessing soil and water in the vicinity of the former Fire Station for PFAS impacts.
- The results of this site assessment will determine if remediation or on-going management is required.
- The results of the assessment and any remedial works, if required, will be independently audited by a specialist contaminated land environmental auditor and the auditor's findings reviewed by the EPA.
- The St Thomas Aquinas Primary School and the Ginninderra Christian Church sites have been placed on the Register of Contaminated Sites (Register) in accordance with the *Environment Protection Act 1997*. Sites are included on the register where the EPA requires an assessment of potentially contaminated land or has received notification of an audit from an approved auditor. The Register can be accessed via:  
[https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/services/contaminated\\_sites#/](https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/services/contaminated_sites#/)

More information is available at:

PFAS in the ACT at:

[https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/4222/~/pfas-national-environmental-management-plan](https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/answers/detail/a_id/4222/~/pfas-national-environmental-management-plan)

PFAS Nationally at:

<https://www.pfas.gov.au/advice>