**SAFEWORK NSW PUBLISHES INFORMATION AND TECHNICAL GUIDE ON PFAS**

Safework NSW (the state regulator on matters relating to work health and safety) have recently published an [information page](http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/health-and-safety/safety-topics-a-z/hazardous-chemical/working-safety-with-pfas-containing-aqueous-film-forming-firefighting-foams) for current and ex-workers on potential health concerns regarding the use, handling and storage of PFAS containing aqueous film forming foams (AFFF) and their contaminants.

A [technical guide](http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/media/publications/health-and-safety/working-safely-with-pfas-containing-aqueous-film-forming-firefighting-foams-technical-guide) has also been published, which details the sources, affected workers, and safe handling techniques for workers who handle PFAS. The following advice has been issued as guidance for workers to reduce the risk of exposure to PFAS contained in AFFF:

**In firefighting situations**

Fire fighters may be exposed to PFAS containing AFFF as well as other hazardous chemicals in firefighting situations. Full structural firefighting uniform, including gloves and respiratory protection, must therefore be worn at all times as recommended by Fire and Rescue NSW. More information is available from [Fire & Rescue NSW PFAS Questions and answers](http://www.nswfbr.org.au/Information%20Sheet%20-%20PFAS%20Questions%20&%20Answers.pdf).

**In spills, decontamination and disposal situations**

For fire fighters decanting or pouring PFAS containing AFFF, or workers decontaminating firefighting equipment and accidental spills of AFFF, a minimum level of personal protective clothing and equipment (PPE) including: rubber gloves, P2 respirators, duty wear/overalls and splash proof goggles must be worn at all times as recommended by Fire and Rescue NSW.

**Workers undertaking remediation tasks in PFAS contaminated sites**

It is understood that workers in PFAS contaminated sites may encounter in addition to PFAS, other known and unknown hazards at any stage. It is therefore important to conduct and review control measures through all stages of assessment, remediation and management. Workers may need to use a range of PPE according to the type and level of contamination. This include boots, respirators, gloves, and chemical protective clothing. The highest order of control should always be employed.

(Note: Other contaminants may include substances such as volatile organic solvents, fuels such as petrol and diesel, heavy metals, pesticides and various hazardous wastes. They may be found in the soil or groundwater and can present a health risk to workers.)

Workers who are undertaking remediation tasks in PFAS contaminated sites are also advised not to use groundwater, bore water, surface water or home grown produce for any purpose as advised by the NSW Health and NSW EPA to residents in contaminated areas.

More information on the management of PFAS found in contaminated sites is available on the [Department of Environment Regulation, Western Australia website](https://www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/your-environment/contaminated-sites/guidelines/Guideline-on-Assessment-and-Management-of-PFAS-.pdf).

**People who work in or near PFAS Investigation/Management areas**

People who work in or near PFAS Investigation/Management areas should follow the same precautionary measures in the use groundwater, bore water, surface water or home grown produce as advised by the NSW EPA for residents. This advice is site specific, for example, the NSW EPA has recommended a set of precautionary advice for residents in the entire (primary, secondary and broader) management area at the Williamtown Air Force base.

**EXPERT HEALTH PANEL FOR PFAS REPORT**

An Expert Health Panel for PFAS was established in October 2017 to advise the Australian Government on the potential health impacts associated with PFAS exposure and to identify priority areas for further research.

In May 2018, the expert panel [handed down its findings](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr18-dept-dept05.htm) to the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP. The panel concluded there is mostly limited, or in some cases no evidence, that human exposure to PFAS is linked with human disease. Importantly, the panel concluded there is “no current evidence that suggests an increase in overall cancer risk. [The report is available here.](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas-expert-panel.htm)

The panel also concluded that much of the evidence available is weak and inconsistent and that decisions to minimise exposure to PFAS chemicals should be largely based on their known ability to persist and accumulate in the body.

It acknowledges there is some research that identifies associations with health outcomes such as high cholesterol. However, there is limited or no evidence of human disease accompanying these associations and many of them are not considered to be clinically significant and require further research.

The panel’s report has been provided to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and it will be used to inform the $12.5 million National Research Program into the Human Health Effects of Prolonged Exposure to PFAS.