

Dubbo: PFAS investigations

Key points

- Dubbo Regional Council has detected Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) within six irrigation bores in Dubbo City.
- Council has tested the town water supply and determined that it remains safe to drink.
- The EPA and Council are undertaking a Water Use Survey in Dubbo to increase understanding of local groundwater use.
- The EPA and Council will keep the community updated.

What is known so far?

Dubbo Council has tested the city's water supply from the water treatment facility. These tests did not detect any PFAS leaving the facility and entering the town water supply. **Dubbo's town water remains safe to drink.**

Council has continued the investigation into the presence and extent of PFAS within the groundwater across Dubbo. These investigations are ongoing, and the community will be updated as they progress.

Do residents need to do anything?

Finding PFAS in the environment does not mean there is a human health risk. It is important to assess if there are exposure pathways through which people might ingest PFAS, such as drinking contaminated ground water or consuming food products watered with contaminated ground water. The EPA and Dubbo Regional Council are undertaking a Water Use Survey across a wide

area in Dubbo to increase understanding of local groundwater use.

Regardless of PFAS detections, NSW Health recommends that people do not use groundwater for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene (including cleaning teeth and bathing) without testing and appropriate treatment.

Council has also undertaken sampling in the Macquarie River and the river is safe to use for recreational purposes. The Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries will be undertaking sampling of several local fish species as a precaution.

Why is PFAS testing being undertaken in Dubbo?

In November 2019, Dubbo Regional Council assessed the feasibility of using some of Dubbo's irrigation bores to supplement town water supply. This assessment included the chemical analysis of groundwater to determine its suitability as drinking water. Analyses determined that PFAS were present in six of these irrigation bores.

What are PFAS?

PFAS are a group of manufactured chemicals that include perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS).

Due to their fire retardant, waterproofing and stain resistant qualities, these chemicals were widely used in some types of fire-fighting foams and other industrial products worldwide. PFAS can also be found in low concentrations in many consumer products like food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing and shampoo.

The most common and prevalent sources of PFAS in the environment are where fire-fighting foams were used for training purposes, particularly on Department of Defence bases and at fire-fighting training facilities.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that do not easily break down and can persist in the environment. Products containing PFAS are being phased out around the world.

Are PFAS a health risk?

Finding PFAS in the environment does not necessarily mean there is a human health risk. Expert advice released by the Australian Government in June 2019¹ states PFAS has not been shown to cause disease in humans and “probably has minimal impact on human health”.

However, the Australian Government’s PFAS Expert Health Panel recommends limiting exposure to PFAS as a precaution until further research into health effects is completed. The NSW Government adopts this precautionary approach to assess and limit exposure pathways to PFAS.

Typically, this approach means assessing and minimising human exposure pathways, such as the consumption of groundwater and home grown produce where threshold levels of PFAS are present.

Dermal (skin) contact, inhalation including dust inhalation, and incidental ingestion of PFAS impacted soil are not primary exposure pathways for PFAS.

What are the next steps?

NSW Government agencies, including the EPA, NSW Health, and the Department of Primary Industries will use the Water Use Survey, the results from the sampling program and the results from the fish sampling to decide if precautionary dietary advice is needed to minimise exposure to PFAS.

The EPA will oversee the investigation process to make sure it is conducted in a timely and scientifically robust manner and will keep the community updated.

Where can I find more information?

More information on the NSW Government’s response to PFAS can be found at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the 24/7 NSW Environment Line on **131 555** or Dubbo City Council on **(02) 6801 4000**.

References

1. The 2019 enHealth Guidance Statements and a fact sheet providing more information on PFAS and human health effects by the Department of Health is available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas.htm#enHealth>

NSW Environment Protection Authority

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 978 1 922447 27 2 | EPA 2020P2604

October 2020

The EPA [disclaimer](#) and [copyright](#) information is available on the EPA website.