

Rutherford Industrial Estate: PFAS Investigations and precautionary advice

Information for local residents

Key Points

- Residents bordering Stony Creek who water, or allow their chickens and livestock to access the creek water, should avoid consuming eggs, milk and home-slaughtered livestock.
- Residents bordering Fishery Creek (downstream of the confluence with Stony Creek), and Wallis Creek (downstream of the confluence with Fishery Creek), who water or allow their livestock to access the creek water, should avoid eating home-slaughtered livestock.
- Vegetables grown using creek water are safe to consume.
- This advice was issued in June 2018 and remains unchanged.
- The EPA is investigating sources of PFAS across the Rutherford Industrial Estate so action can be taken to reduce exposure pathways for the community.

What are PFAS?

PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) 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 have been widely used in many industrial and consumer products worldwide.

PFAS can be found in food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing, and some types of fire-fighting foam.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that can gradually accumulate over time in living things such as humans and animals. PFAS do not easily break down, and can persist for a long time in the environment. PFAS are being phased out around the world.

Does PFAS affect my health?

PFAS are what's known as an 'emerging contaminant'. This means international research is yet to completely determine if there are any health effects.

The Australian Government's PFAS Expert Health Panel has concluded that, while there is no current evidence that suggests a person's health will be significantly impacted from high levels of PFAS, important health effects cannot be ruled out either. A factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health is available from the Commonwealth Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au/pfas.

Do I need to do anything?

Because the potential health effects of PFAS, residents living on properties bordering the creeks in Rutherford should follow the advice below to minimise their exposure to PFAS:

Residents bordering Stony Creek

- Where chickens and livestock have been watered with, or have access to creek water, avoid consuming eggs, milk and home-slaughtered livestock.

Residents bordering Fishery Creek (downstream of the confluence with Stony Creek) and Wallis Creek (downstream of the confluence with Fishery Creek)

- Where livestock have been watered with or have access to creek water, avoid eating home-slaughtered livestock.

General advice for all residents

- Where home produced eggs, milk and livestock have been watered using reticulated (town) water or rainwater, these are safe to consume.
- Vegetables grown using creek water are safe to consume.

Why is testing being undertaken in the Rutherford Industrial Estate and along the creeks?

The EPA first undertook testing for PFAS in the Rutherford Industrial Estate and in nearby creeks after a containment system at the former Trugain premises overflowed into nearby Stony Creek in 2018. Since then, other historical sources of PFAS have been identified as part of the EPA's investigations.

PFAS has been found in varying levels which is not unexpected given the historic use of PFAS in the area in a variety of industrial operations. A copy of the testing results can be found at <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas>.

What will happen next?

The EPA will continue to investigate other sources of PFAS in the Rutherford Industrial Estate, as part of the NSW Government's PFAS investigation program.

Work to ensure the former Trugain premises is safe for the community and the environment is continuing, with legal notices served on the owner to clean up the site. The owner has engaged a contractor with a mobile treatment plant licence that is treating the water to ensure the site is contained and made safe. The EPA will continue to work with both the former Trugain site owner and Maitland City Council to prevent potential future discharges in the creek system.

National Textile Mill operated within the Rutherford Industrial Estate in the past. PFAS containing chemicals were commonly used to treat fabrics. Accordingly, the EPA is also working collaboratively with the current owner of the former textile site, Cleanaway, to establish the extent of any PFAS contamination sources.

The EPA will provide updates on investigations when available.

Where can I find more information?

More information on PFAS can be found at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the NSW Environment Line **131 555**