

NSW Mines Rescue (Mines Rescue) has voluntarily joined the Environment Protection Authority's (EPA) investigation program to assess the impact of historic use of per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) across NSW. Mines Rescue had phased out the use of fire fighting foams containing PFAS by 2002.

As a result of past use of PFAS-containing fire fighting foams in essential training, traces of PFAS were found in the soil on the Newcastle and Hunter Valley Mines Rescue sites which warranted further investigation. In August 2017, stage two investigations were undertaken at these sites and initial investigations commenced at Lithgow. The Mines Rescue Station at Woonona was built after Mines Rescue had phased out the use of fire fighting foams containing PFAS; hence no testing was undertaken at this site.

The risk to human and environmental receptors at this stage of the investigation is considered to be low. These results were expected. Further testing will now take place which will allow us to further define the potential impact of PFAS in areas surrounding our Mines Rescue properties and include monitoring during seasonal variations.

Stage two investigation overview

The objective of the stage two investigations was to critically assess the potential risks to human health and environmental receptors.

Soil and sediment, ground water and surface water samples were collected and analysed on all sites. These were taken from areas most likely to be impacted by PFAS based on the findings of the preliminary investigations as well as known information about the sites such as geology of the soils, aerial photographs and past practices at the sites.

What did the investigations find?

Across all sites there were some areas where the presence of PFAS was higher than current guidelines. However, the overall assessment of risk to human health and environmental receptors is considered to be low at this stage of the investigation.

This assessment is determined by a number of factors including:

- the presence of municipal drinking water in all nearby areas to each station
- the presence of PFAS on site or through recreational use off site is unlikely to result in human ingestion.

More information about the investigations and results can be found on our website.

Next steps

While the risk to human and environmental receptors has been assessed as low at this stage of the investigations, in line with the EPA's precautionary approach, it has been determined that further testing on all sites would be beneficial to consider seasonal and wet weather variations, including additional groundwater monitoring down gradient of the sites.

Further testing will also confirm the direction of groundwater flow in Lithgow.

The detailed program of works and schedule is currently being determined in line with the EPA's investigation process.

Is my health at risk?

The likelihood of eating or drinking contaminated food or water (the most likely way for humans to be exposed to PFAS) at levels higher than current guidelines on or around the Mines Rescue sites is low. Additionally, the Department of Health maintains that there is no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects.

Where can I find more information?

Sources and useful links for more information:

www.minesrescueservices.com/MessageForceWebsite/Sites/311/Files/UseofPFASatNSWMinesRescue-August2017.pdf

<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Mediainformation/pfasinvestigation.htm>

www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/clm/decision-tree-pfas-contaminated-sites.pdf

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/pfos.aspx>

How can I contact Mines Rescue?

For more information please visit www.minesrescueservices.com, call us on 1300 001 262 or email customerconnect@coalservices.com.au