



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: AB:mb

Mr Shane Fitzsimmons
Commissioner
NSW Rural Fire Service
Locked Bag 17
GRANVILLE NSW 2142

By email: shane.fitzsimmons@rfs.nsw.gov.au
ken.middleton@rfsa.org.au
mick.holton@volunteerfirefighters.org.au

Dear Commissioner,

Re: Per and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) and Current Firefighting Foams

I am writing to request information on the personal protective equipment provided in the safe handling of currently used Firefighting Foam Concentrates.

The Public Service Association ('PSA') wrote to the NSW Rural Fire Service ('RFS') on 12 September 2018 seeking advice and details surrounding the RFS's handling, disposal, future plans and replacements for Firefighting Foam products containing PFAS. We also sought RFS's position on voluntary blood testing for RFS staff and volunteers ('RFS members').

The RFS met with the PSA at RFS Headquarters on Wednesday, 19 December 2018. RFS representatives were:

- Bruce MacDonald, Executive Director, Infrastructure
- John Parnaby, Director Assets & Infrastructure
- Andrew Canderle, Manager Engineering Services
- David Heslop, Manager Health, Safety & Welfare
- Vicki Campbell, Manager Operational Business and Procurement

PSA representatives were:

- Andrew Kaye, PSA Delegate, RFS Departmental Committee
- Ian Tuit, WHS Officer, PSA
- Suzanne Mann, WHS Educator, PSA

The RFS advised:

- Fire Fighting Foam containing PFAS was quarantined in 2007;
- Destruction of the quarantined stock began in 2015;
- Numerous sites where these foams were used have been tested and are being remediated; and
- Any new firefighting foams will be 'future proofed' to ensure fire fighter safety.

RFS further advised despite the Fire Fighting Foam containing PFAS being quarantined in 2007, it was impossible to confirm that these stocks were not subsequently used by Brigades. Further, there are small stocks yet to be collected for disposal.

The PSA sought that the RFS begin a register of RFS members who believe they have been exposed to PFAS. The register would be the basis of future blood testing to confirm PFAS exposure and degree of exposure. The PSA contend that a register followed by blood testing is vital to ensure the health of former, current and future RFS members. It will also create a baseline of exposure and aid in future diagnosis should health complications occur to any RFS members. Unfortunately, the RFS did not agree to a register or blood testing of those who register.

The PSA sought information on the use of non PFAS Fire Fighting Foam. RFS provided names of replacement Fire Fighting Foam and approximate dates they came into service:

- Fire-Brake Bushfire Class A Foam Concentrate (1985)
- Forexpan (2004/5)
- Phos-Chek WD-881 Class A Foam Concentrate (2004/5)
- Niagara C6 3/3 (2007)

The RFS provided a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheets ('MSDS') for each of the above Fire Fighting Foams and S.O.P. #16 Use of Water and Water/Chemical Mixes, 1999 ('SOP'). The MSDS and SOP are attached to the email with this letter.

The SOP states:

Use all precautions specified in the appropriate Material Safety Data Sheet when decanting or handling open containers of firefighting chemical concentrates (if not specified, as a minimum use PVC gloves and protective goggles).

The MSDS details when handling each of these products in concentrated form that chemical resistant gloves (butyl rubber) and chemical goggles should be used.

The PSA is seeking your response to:

1. Details of personal protective equipment issued by the RFS for the safe handling of each of these products following the MSDS for each product.

2. A copy of all RFS procedures for the safe storage, handling and use of each of these products, including during decontamination of spills to self and to the environment, and
3. Confirmation that all PFAS Fire Fighting Foam containing PFAS have been removed from all RFS workplaces and destroyed.

Given the seriousness of these Work Health & Safety concerns to all RFS members copy of this letter and its attachments has been provided to the Rural Fire Service Association and to the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association.

Please feel free to contact Andrew Boulton, Industrial Officer by email at aboulton@psa.asn.au in relation to this letter.

Yours sincerely,



TROY WRIGHT
ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

Attachments

28 March 2019