Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center

Former Reese PFAS FAQs

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) FAQs

Q: What are PFAS?
A: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are synthetic fluorinated organic chemicals used in many industrial and consumer products such as nonstick cookware, stain-resistant fabric and carpet, some food packaging and specialized foam, including Aqueous Film Forming Foam. AFFF is highly effective for controlling petroleum-based fires, and is used by the military services, commercial aviation and industry.

Q: How does this affect the local community around the former Reese Air Force Base?
A: The Air Force used AFFF to extinguish fires during training events at the former Reese Air Force Base, which led to PFAS within the foam seeping into the groundwater. At the time, the Air Force understood the foam to be environmentally safe and used it per the manufacturer's instructions. Now that more is known about the contaminants and their potential harmful effects, the Air Force has immediately begun to take aggressive measures to make sure the local community on and around the base has drinking water that does not exceed the EPA lifetime health advisory or TCEQ PCLs.

Q: How many people are affected around the former Reese Air Force Base?
A: To date, 480 drinking water wells have been sampled in a three-mile area in the direction of groundwater flow. Of these, 222 private wells and three public wells exceeded the EPA's Lifetime Health Advisory (LHA) levels for Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) and Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) (or sum of PFOS and PFOA), and/or additional PFAS for which the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has published Protective Concentration Levels.

Q. When will the water in the area be safe to drink?
A. Currently, in the area believed to be affected and where the AF has been given permission to sample, no one is drinking water above the EPA lifetime health advisory or TCEQ PCLs. The Air Force provided bottled water for residents and/or installed whole-house filtration systems at all tested drinking water wells above the EPA's LHA, and/or additional PFAS above the TCEQ's PCLs. A Final Notice has been sent to approximately 38 landowners within the area who have not yet given the AF permission to sample. This notice is the final attempt to reach homeowners; if homeowners later chooses to be tested, they must proactively reach out to the Air Force to coordinate well sampling.

Q. How many water filtration systems have been installed?
A: As of May 2019, the Air Force has installed 181 whole-house treatment systems consisting of granular activated carbon and ion exchange resin, to the affected homes and will install the remaining systems by the end of June 2019. The Air Force continues to monitor the installed systems to ensure they are effectively treating drinking water.

Q: How do we know if we will get hooked up to city water or get a filtration system installed?
A: Typically, if you live outside the city limits and have a well that falls within the study area, likely you will get a filtration system. Alternatively, there may be a plan in the future to create a community water system in an area impacted outside the city limits if it is feasible to do so.

If you live within the city limits of the study area, you have had a treatment system installed, but will eventually have the opportunity to be connected to municipal water. Municipal water is managed by the City of Lubbock, which meets all state and federal drinking water requirements and requires less maintenance to ensure you are drinking safe water. To date, the Air Force has connected one business to municipal water and is in preliminary discussions with the City of Lubbock to connect impacted homes within the city limits of the study area to municipal water.

Q: If the Air Force installs a filtration system at my house, is it going to pay to maintain the system?
A: Yes, the Air Force will pay for system installation, monitoring and maintenance. When the Air Force installs the system, we will monitor it on a routine basis to ensure it continues to operate properly. The systems have multiple filters, and we have never had exceedances of the EPA lifetime health advisory or TCEQ protective concentration levels of PFAS after the filters.

Q: Will the Air Force pay my water bill if connected to city water?
A: The homeowner is responsible for paying the water bill.

Q. What are the health effects for PFAS?
A. The Air Force depends on the EPA and the Department of Health and Humans Services for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to determine potential danger to human health and the environment. Locally, the Texas Department of State Health Services or the Lubbock Health Department may also have information.

Q: Will the Air Force test us for health impacts if our wells are contaminated?
A: Currently, the Air Force is focused on ensuring those affected have drinking water below the EPA lifetime health advisory and TCEQ's PCLs, to understand the extent of the contamination, and to find a remedy. However, the ATSDR will be conducting exposure assessments in communities near current or former military bases and that are known to have had PFAS in their drinking water. Reese is one of the communities.

The primary goal of these exposure assessments is to provide information to communities about levels of PFAS in their bodies. This information will also be used to help inform future studies evaluating the impact of PFAS exposure on human health. For more information on the ATSDR's assessment, visit their website at www.atsdr.cdc.gov.

Q: Why has it taken so long for the Air Force identify the contaminated wells and install the treatment systems?
A: The Air Force determined the drinking water aquifer was impacted in September 2017, and began sampling wells downgradient from the former AFB in November 2017. Access agreements needed to be obtained, and sample results usually take about a month to receive. The sampling areas were expanded when results from wells indicated sampling in a wider geographical area was necessary. Within the past 18 months we have sampled 484 wells within 3 miles downgradient from the former base. Treatment systems require coordination with landowners, obtaining access agreements, dig clearances, and setting of structures to contain the treatment equipment.