

WEST GATE TUNNEL PROJECT: PFAS FACTSHEET



Key points:

- Low levels of PFAS in soil are not harmful to the public, during soil removal, relocation or disposal.
- PFAS has been widely used, in Australia, and globally, since the 1940s, in a range of everyday applications.
- Most people are exposed to small amounts of PFAS every day in dust, air, food, water and contact with consumer products containing these chemicals.
- Scientific understanding about the potential health implications of PFAS is still developing. The Australian Government established an Expert Health Panel for PFAS, to advise the Australian Government. The panel found there is limited to no evidence of human disease or other clinically significant harm resulting from PFAS exposure at this time.
- Despite these findings, the Victorian Government has a strong track record of taking a conservative, safety focused approach to the management of PFAS.

1. What are PFAS?

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are manufactured chemicals, used in products to resist heat, oil, stains and water. Some PFAS have been widely used, in Australia, and globally, since the 1940s, in a range of applications, such as firefighting foams, stain and waterproofing products, cosmetics and sunscreens, kitchenware and medical devices.

2. Why is there concern about PFAS?

PFAS chemicals take a long time to break down in the environment and can travel through soil and water. PFAS can build up and remain in the

bodies of humans and animals for years. Due to everyday exposure to small amounts in dust, air, food, water and contact with consumer products containing these chemicals, it would be not unexpected for people to have low levels of PFAS in their blood system.

3. How could PFAS affect me?

Scientific understanding about the potential health implications of PFAS is still developing. The Australian Government established an Expert Health Panel for PFAS, to advise the Australian Government. The panel found there is limited to no evidence of human disease or other clinically significant harm resulting from PFAS exposure at this time. Importantly, the Panel concluded there is "no current evidence that suggests an increase in overall cancer risk".

As a precaution, the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) recommends minimising PFAS exposure wherever possible. Governments across Australia provide site-specific advice to people living near PFAS investigation areas, on ways to reduce their exposure.

4. Why is PFAS an issue for the West Gate Tunnel Project?

Initial testing shows low levels of PFAS can be expected when tunnelling starts, which has triggered preventative measures. Finding contaminants in soil unearthed during major infrastructure construction is common, especially around former and existing industrial and commercial sites. We are able to manage the soil safely under guidelines provided by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA Victoria).

This fact sheet has been prepared in consultation with the EPA to provide information about PFAS for the community.

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5. What steps are being taken to protect the public?

The Project is implementing precautionary measures to ensure there is no risk to public safety. This includes reducing dust, covering trucks during transportation, and working with EPA Victoria to protect groundwater. PFAS are not harmful to the public during soil removal, relocation or disposal. Worksafe is also involved in checking that soil handling procedures are meeting the requirements of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*.

6. What about West Gate Tunnel Project workers?

We are following strict regulatory protocols to identify and manage soil, to look after the safety of workers, the community and the environment. We do this in conjunction with regulatory bodies, including WorkSafe and EPA Victoria.

7. Where can I find out more about PFAS?

Commonwealth and State government agencies are developing online resources detailing the latest understanding, approach and advice about PFAS.

They include:

- **Commonwealth PFAS website**
<https://www.pfas.gov.au>
- **Commonwealth Department of Health website**
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas.htm>
- **EPA Victoria**
<https://ref.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/land-and-groundwater/pfas-in-victoria>

For more information please contact West Gate Tunnel Project via either:

W: westgatetunnelproject.vic.gov.au

P: 1800 105 105

E: info@wgta.vic.gov.au

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PROJECT

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