AIRPORTS COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL
NORTH AMERICA

THE *VOICE* OF AIRPORTS®

CANADA'S AIRPORTS

Understanding PFAS in the Airport Industry

September 2019

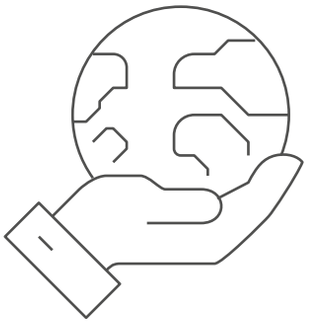
What is PFAS?

Per-and Polyfluoralkyl Substances (PFAS) are a group of human made chemicals that have been used since the 1940s in a wide variety of products, including non-stick cookware, stain-resistant fabric, water-repellent clothing, and firefighting foam. Due to its widespread use in cooking and household products, clothing, and other consumer goods, and its presence in the environment, most people have come into contact with PFAS in some form. While PFAS has been proven to be very useful in many applications, including firefighting at airports, there is growing concern over the potential health effects from PFAS, in particular a small subset of PFAS historically used across industries, including firefighting foams.

What is the impact for Canadian airports?

For many years, Transport Canada required airports to use firefighting foam containing PFAS, as the agency previously determined that only PFAS-based firefighting foam had the ability to quickly extinguish any fires, including those involving aviation fuel. However, some of the properties that make PFAS excellent at suppressing fire — its ability to smother a fire, its resistance to thermal breakdown, and its ability to be stored for long periods of time — also contribute to environmental concerns because the substances do not easily break down.

Recently, the Canadian Airports Council and member airports have successfully lobbied Transport Canada to allow the use of non-PFAS-based firefighting foam, provided it meets all the minimum international aviation safety requirements.



What are Canadian airports doing to address environmental concerns?

Airports are committed to being responsible partners with their communities and operating in an environmentally responsible way. Airports must continue to comply with International Civil Aviation Organization's requirements, as well as those of Transport Canada to ensure the ongoing safety of the travelling public. As a result, the transition to non-PFAS firefighting foam will be gradual to ensure ongoing operational readiness. The airport community is aware of emerging environmental concerns. As such, airports are working to reduce or eliminate the discharge of PFAS containing foam during non-emergency activities.

We are carefully monitoring ongoing research, in the areas of testing, PFAS sources and attribution, and proper remediation and clean-up procedures. The airport community is closely following and providing input to provincial and federal regulatory progress with regard to responsible management of PFAS to help develop environmentally protective guidelines that also maintain safe airport operations for the flying public.

To learn more about Airports Council International – North America, please visit www.airportscouncil.org.