

Q1. What is PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances)?

A1. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) as a large group of man-made chemicals that are resistant to heat, water, and oil. PFAS have been classified by the EPA as an emerging contaminant on the national landscape. For decades, they have been used in many industrial applications and consumer products such as carpeting, waterproof clothing, upholstery, food paper wrappings, personal care products, fire-fighting foams, and metal plating. They are still used today. PFAS have been found at low levels both in the environment and in blood samples of the general U.S. population. For more information on PFAS, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/pfas>

Q2. What does PFAS have to do with the Airport?

A2. Learning about PFAS and its impacts has become an evolving national conversation. According to the EPA, PFAS is used in many different chemicals, including firefighting foam, certain types of food packaging and some manufacturing practices. The use of firefighting materials known as AFFF, or aqueous film-forming foam, is a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirement for all commercial airports across the country. Currently, all of the AFFF formulations authorized for use by the FAA contain some type of PFAS.

Q3. Is the Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GFIA) still using products with PFAS?

A3. For air transportation safety, the FAA requires airports like GFIA to use AFFF containing PFAS because of its effectiveness in extinguishing jet-fuel fires. The GFIA took proactive steps by voluntarily moving to an AFFF product that is asserted to have less environmental risk. However, all FAA required AFFF products still contain some form of PFAS.

Q4. What is the airport currently doing to understand any potential issues?

A4. GFIA continues its commitment to learning about the potential for PFAS on airport property including the testing of soil from the former firefighter training area and the testing of groundwater and stormwater on airport property. Consistent with past tests of both soil and water, the GFIA is continuing to use a stepwise approach and making decisions based on data from earlier tests. Current testing is being coordinated with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). The airport has also applied for a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation Office of Aeronautics to further evaluate the extent and distribution of PFAS impacts at the airport.

Q5. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected this process?

A5. GFIA remains committed to learning about the potential for PFAS on airport property, despite the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic reduction of passenger traffic at the airport. GFIA continues to use a stepwise approach and is using data from earlier tests to identify locations for additional investigation efforts.

Q6. What has the airport done since PFAS concerns were first raised in 2018?

A6. GFIA has been actively engaged in a multi-phase evaluation process to assess the potential impacts of historical PFAS use, with the results from each phase guiding subsequent steps:

- In May 2018, GFIA shared details of its complex, scientific testing process, involving the drilling of five deep monitoring wells and 10 shallow borings on Airport property, and began collecting samples to better characterize existing conditions and other key factors for informing additional investigations based on these results. [See press release here.](#)
- In June 2018, GFIA shared its initial groundwater testing results on Airport property, with results indicating PFAS levels less than the State of Michigan cleanup criteria established for groundwater, as protection for drinking water. The results were shared with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the Kent County Health Department (KCHD), the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the community. [See press release here.](#)
- Although the groundwater test results were within acceptable regulatory levels, GFIA went above and beyond to conduct voluntary, off-site residential well testing. In September 2018, the results of the residential well testing indicated the drinking water at the 28 properties tested all showed non-detect for PFOA and PFOS, the two PFAS compounds that comprise the basis for EPA lifetime health advisories. Based on the data and results, the Kent County Health Department concurred that there was no need for the Airport to continue additional residential testing. [See press release here.](#)
- In early 2019, the MDEQ conducted an independent geological review, which concluded that any PFAS found in groundwater under the Airport (that GFIA had reported in June 2018) does not appear to be related to the Airport's former firefighting training activities. The MDEQ is continuing to explore possible PFAS sources beyond Airport property.
- Throughout the process, GFIA has worked with MDEQ, which in April 2019 was renamed as the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) to learn more about PFAS. During this time EGLE has also done its own testing of groundwater in areas near the airport.
- In Spring, 2020, GFIA was one of several Michigan airports to apply for grant funding from the Michigan Department of Transportation Office of Aeronautics and plans to use the funds to continue soil testing at several locations on airport property, including the former firefighting area.