

AF awards replacement firefighting foam contract

By Air Force Civil Engineer Center Public Affairs / Published August 15, 2016

16

PRINT | E-MAIL

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas (AFNS) -- The Air Force has awarded a \$6.2 million contract to replace firefighting foam used in fire vehicles with an environmentally responsible foam to reduce the risk of possible contamination of soil and groundwater.

ICL Performance Products was awarded the contract Aug. 15 for 418,000 gallons of Phos-Chek 3 percent, six carbon chain aqueous film forming foam (AFFF). The Air Force expects delivery to begin in August and for all foam in fire vehicles and fire stations to be replaced by the end of 2016.

“AFFF is used by civilian and military firefighters to extinguish fires in aircraft accidents and other emergencies where jet fuel and other petroleum-based flammable materials are present,” said James Podolske Jr., the Air Force fire chief. “The Phos-Chek foam will replace the current product in use in Air Force fire vehicles.”

The Air Force is replacing the foam to reduce the potential risk of contamination from perfluorinated compounds in AFFF. These compounds, commonly called PFCs, are found in many commercial products.

The Environmental Protection Agency has classified PFCs as “contaminants of concern,” and set health advisory levels for drinking water supplies in May. Two specific compounds are the focus of regulatory interest: perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS).

Podolske said Phos-Chek was developed under the EPA’s PFC Stewardship Program. The foam is PFOS free, and contains little or no PFOA.

“The Air Force must continue to use AFFF in its defense operations to protect people, critical weapon systems and infrastructure, but we will do so in a more environmentally responsible way that also makes our operations safer for the public,” Podolske said.

The Air Force also recently awarded a contract to retrofit all aircraft rescue and firefighting vehicles with specialized equipment that will let firefighters conduct fire vehicle operational checks and required annual foam tests without discharging any AFFF into the environment. Retrofitting the Air Force’s fleet of more than 800 vehicles will take about 15 months, Podolske said.

The Air Force has restricted AFFF use for emergencies only. When AFFF is used, Air Force hazardous materials teams will treat the response scene as a hazardous site, and remove and destroy foam residue before contamination can occur.

The Air Force is considering several courses of action to address the AFFF used in aircraft hangar fire suppression systems. Unlike mobile fire trucks, the AFFF in hangars is contained to a stationary location, which is a more stable and controlled environment, Podolske said.

Replacing the foam is part of the Air Force’s aggressive efforts to ensure PFCs are not a threat to human health and the environment, said Mark Correll, the deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for environment, safety and infrastructure.

16