

Monday 24 August 2020

West Lakes residents notified of PFAS contamination

The EPA letterboxed more than 700 homes and contacted community organisations in the West Lakes area, to advise of elevated concentrations of per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the area.

Residents are being advised that management measures previously put in place to protect them from cadmium in the area will also protect them from exposure to PFAS through contaminated soils.

This latest advice follows the EPA receiving a statutory notification identifying elevated PFAS concentrations in soil, groundwater and sewage sludge samples collected at and in the vicinity of the former Port Adelaide wastewater treatment plant.

During the development of West Lakes in the early 1970s, sewage sludge from the wastewater treatment plant was distributed over parts of the suburb. In 2000 the sewage sludge was found to contain cadmium and management measures were put in place to protect home owners. Those measures involved using paving, concreting, lawns and new garden bed soil to place a barrier between the sludge and residents.

The EPA has assessed the data provided in the statutory notification, received on 19 August 2020, and considers that it is likely that the contaminated sludge at West Lakes will also contain PFAS.

EPA Director Regulation Peter Dolan said that the EPA will now investigate whether the PFAS has migrated through the soil into groundwater or surface waters. A water quality monitoring program in the lake and groundwater will be implemented as soon as possible and residents and lake users will be advised of the results as soon as they are available.

“We have implemented a community engagement program which includes hand-delivery of letters and information, emails to stakeholder groups including lake users, website information, and residents will be able to contact the EPA by email or telephone,” Mr Dolan said.

“Recreational use of the lake, fishing, and consuming home grown fruit, vegetables and eggs are not expected to be major pathways of exposure to PFAS.

“If residents have followed the existing management measures for cadmium then they should not be concerned about PFAS exposure through their soil.”

PFAS was not regarded as a chemical of concern in the early 2000s and it was not routinely tested for at the time.