AGC Chemicals Europe Ltd – Legacy Contamination Inspection
June 2025 Update

Introduction

- **Purpose**: In March 2024, due to concerns about historic contamination and the potential for aerial emissions and deposition of PFOA, Wyre Council formally requested that the Environment Agency carry out an inspection of the AGC facility and surrounding land under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Contaminated Land Regime).
- **Accountabilities:** Under Part 2A, local authorities - in this case Wyre Council - are the primary regulators. However, for sites that meet specific criteria related to type of site and nature of impact, the legislation recognises the Environment Agency as better suited to lead the inspection phase. In this case, the Environment Agency is responsible for coordinating the inspection and assessing potential risks. Nonetheless, the final determination of whether the land is formally determined as "contaminated" remains the sole responsibility of Wyre Council.
- **Scope**: The Environment Agency is overseeing both on-site and off-site inspections, supported by a multi-agency panel that provides strategic oversight and expert advice. Key partners include the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the Food Standards Agency (FSA), and Lancashire Public Health. While the regulators lead off-site investigations, the company is voluntarily conducting on-site assessments under the coordination and scrutiny of the Environment Agency.

Phase 1

- **Scope:** Conducted between September and October 2024, this preliminary inspection involved the shallow soil sampling of 22 land parcels. These locations included easily accessible public land primarily within 1km of the subject site, focusing on parks, playing fields and allotments. A handful of samples were taken from sites up to 5km away.
- **Results:** PFOA was detected in 187 out of 199 samples obtained, representing approximately 94% of samples. All 22 sampled land parcels reported detectable PFOA concentrations, with the maximum concentration reported as 35.1µg/kg. Other PFAS compounds were also detected, but at low concentrations that, based on current evidence, do not pose a concern or warrant further assessment at this time. Adjacent surface waters were also shown to be impacted by a range of PFAS and industrial solvents. The assessment of the water environment is ongoing.

Phase 2

- **Scope:** Conducted between December 2024 and March 2025, building on the findings of Phase 1, Phase 2 aimed to better delineate PFOA dispersion patterns. It comprised a grid-based sampling pattern focusing primarily on residential gardens within the zone of greatest anticipated chemical deposition. Additionally, more intensive sampling of allotment soils, combined with produce testing, was conducted to understand health risks to those growing and consuming vegetables.
- **Produce:** Vegetables including leeks, sprouts, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, beetroot, and kale were tested. PFOA uptake was confirmed in most vegetables analysed, with beetroot, kale, chard, and cabbage showing the highest concentrations. The FSA stated that regular consumption of large quantities of these vegetables could increase PFAS exposure, potentially exceeding the tolerable weekly intake (TWI) by up to 8 times when considering average background intake from the rest of the diet.
- **Soil**: All allotment soil samples reported detectable PFOA concentrations, with a maximum of 20.2µg/kg and an average of 5.92µg/kg, exceeding the precautionary screening value of 1.4µg/kg. Grid-based soil sampling targeted 63 locations within 500m of the AGC facility, including gardens. 291 soil samples were obtained, with 287 (99%) indicating elevated PFOA with a maximum value of 144µg/kg (average 4.18µg/kg), compared to a screening threshold of 7.6ug/kg for gardens where vegetables are grown. The results paint a picture of sporadic contamination, indicating zones of 'higher' and 'lower' risk. (Note: The screening value for allotments is lower than that for residential gardens due to underlying assumptions including increased exposure to contaminants via more frequent contact with soil and higher proportion of produce consumed.)

Findings

- **Interpretation:** Results from Phase 1 and preliminary outputs from Phase 2 indicate elevated - in some cases highly elevated - PFOA concentrations within the majority of shallow soils within 1km of the subject site. Concentrations appear to increase with proximity to the site. A proportion of the results are elevated above precautionary risk thresholds. Limited

produce testing indicates a range of vegetables are actively taking up PFOA, potentially increasing exposure for those consuming vegetables grown on land near the site.

Next Steps

- **Phase 3:** Initial results from the investigations indicate widespread dispersion of PFOA, with notable impacts on shallow soils. Elevated concentrations have been detected in allotment soils, local produce, and in certain areas surrounding the facility - exceeding published precautionary thresholds. Although the current dataset is not yet comprehensive enough to support a detailed health risk assessment, it clearly demonstrates chemical deposition and environmental impact on soils. It is important to note that exceedances of screening values do not automatically imply an unacceptable risk; however, they do highlight the need for further investigation. Emerging spatial patterns suggest the presence of distinct zones of relatively higher and lower potential risk around the site. Additional sampling (Phase 3) is planned for late Summer / Autumn 2025 to help validate existing results, clarify the level of risk, and support extrapolation of findings to a broader area.

- **Tasks:**
  - Targeted sampling of representative number of gardens within perceived 'higher' risk zone
  - Targeted sampling of representative number of gardens within perceived 'lower' risk zone
  - Assessment of other exposure routes – to include testing of domestic produce

- **On-Site:** Ongoing communication with AGC has provided reassurance regarding the progression of voluntary on-site inspection. They have provided a timeline for 2025/26 indicating their proposed activity schedule for developing a robust conceptual model, a specification for intrusive investigation, reporting, and delivering conclusions. On-site inspection works are due to commence in Autumn 2025 with reporting in early 2026.