

Dept. of Military Affairs: Truax Field - 1st to eliminate facility-based foam

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MADISON, Wis. – The 115th Fighter Wing became the first U.S. Air Force base worldwide to terminate all use of foam-based fire suppression systems in its facilities, surpassing the Air Force’s set date of October 2024.

“We’ve been extremely busy over the last five years planning, designing and constructing facilities, but this is a testament to what we’re getting to do for the future Airmen of the 115th Fighter Wing,” said Lt. Col. Mike Dunlap, the base civil engineer, regarding the F-35 conversion and the opportunity that it presented to remove foam-based fire suppression systems from the base.

High Expansion Foam systems were part of construction design plans when they first began in February 2018, but in November 2021, the Air Force released a policy to remove foam-based fire suppression systems and transition to using water deluge fire protection.

At the time, five hangar facilities were either under construction, fully designed or undergoing design. Recognizing the chance to sooner comply with the policy, in January 2022, the 115th Fighter Wing petitioned the National Guard Bureau and were allowed to modify all five hangar projects.

“The Air Force was not expecting bases to immediately start implementing these changes – that it would take time – and we were doing it two months into them issuing the policy,” said Dunlap. “Environmentally, we knew that this is what the community wanted to move towards.”

Modifying all five design contracts cost approximately \$161,000, but the base saved more than \$1.6 million overall.

“We wanted to do it to comply with the Air Force policy, avoid wasting the taxpayers’ money, and make Truax Field more environmentally safe for members of the local community,” said Dunlap.

Without the modifications, obsolete fire suppression systems requiring annual maintenance would have been installed and kept in place until future facility upgrades were needed.

“This is another excellent example of the outstanding innovation and effort from the 115th Fighter Wing towards solving the nationwide PFAS problem at both the local and national levels,” said Col. Bart Van Roo, the 115th Fighter Wing commander. “From participating in pilot remediation studies with Orin Technologies and our partners at the Dane County Regional Airport, to surpassing the Air Force’s expectations, I’m proud to be a part of a team that cares about the health and safety of our Airmen and the surrounding communities.”