

## **A TIMELY REMINDER TO STAY ALERT TO THE DANGERS OF LEGIONELLA**

**The recent hot weather should have put Facilities Managers on guard against the replication of Legionella in building water supplies.**

This August it will have been 16 years since seven members of the public died and 180 people suffered ill health as a result of an outbreak of Legionella at a council-owned arts and leisure facility in the town centre of Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria.

The council was fined £125,000 for breaching section 3(1) of the act, to which it had earlier pleaded guilty. It was also ordered to pay prosecution costs of £90,000. The outbreak of the disease was traced to the council's air conditioning system.

In the report that followed the case, published on the Health & Safety Executive's website, it cited Barrow Borough Council's failure to carry out Legionella risk assessments and to appoint a "responsible person" to monitor its air conditioning system, combined with badly drafted and managed contracts and a lack of interest by senior management in health and safety issues, as the systematic failures that led to the outbreak.

At Tersus, Scott Whensley advises and supports our clients by providing and implementing training techniques that help to combat the maintenance failings that allow Legionella bacteria and similar hazards to develop in air conditioning and water systems.

Even though these bacteria represent a clear health risk to employees and visitors, managers can fail to implement systems to ensure basic precautions – leaving them open to prosecution if they fail to comply with UK law.

Scott highlights to Tersus' clients that most of the failings associated with the control of Legionella stem from "unsuitable or insufficient risk assessments and poor written schemes of control" and that "training and competence are essential ingredients, but so is ensuring responsibilities and 'authority' are in the right place and this must start with the duty holder."

In support of this essential training we provide a series of advice and guidance notes to our clients and contacts. <http://www.tersusgroup.co.uk/downloads/>

Scott believes that the principles for effective management however have not changed and this means combining a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of all water systems under the duty holders' control; having competent and trained management with roles and responsibilities defined and understood required for everyone involved in the Legionella

control process; a clear written scheme of control for each relevant system, identifying the criteria for success – and what actions to take where this is not achieved; and a water management system and records that provide usable management information.

***“What is Legionella?***

*Legionellosis is a collective term for diseases caused by Legionella bacteria including the most serious Legionnaires’ disease, as well as the similar but less serious conditions of Pontiac fever and Lochgoilhead fever. Legionnaires’ disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia and everyone is susceptible to infection. The risk increases with age, but some people are at higher risk including:*

- *People over 45 years of age;*
- *Smokers and heavy drinkers;*
- *People suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease, diabetes, lung and heart disease; and*
- *Anyone with an impaired immune system.*

*The bacterium Legionella pneumophila and related bacteria are common in natural water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs, but usually in low numbers. They may also be found in purpose-built water systems such as cooling towers, evaporative condensers, hot and cold water systems and spa pools.*

***How do people contract it?***

*People contract Legionnaires’ disease by inhaling small droplets of water (aerosols) suspended in the air that contain the bacteria. Certain conditions increase the risk from Legionella if:*

- *The water temperature in all or some parts of the system may be between 20-45 °C, which is suitable for growth;*
- *It is possible for breathable water droplets to be created and dispersed e.g. aerosol created by a cooling tower, or water outlets;*
- *Water is stored and/or recirculated;*
- *There are deposits that can support bacterial growth providing a source of nutrients for the organism e.g. rust, sludge, scale, organic matter and biofilms.*

***Source: Health and Safety Executive”***