

Hotels – Legionella Control

Hotel operators owe a duty of care to their customers who use showers, basins and baths that may, if not correctly maintained, release Legionella bacteria. This can cause Legionnaires' Disease, which is potentially fatal. The risks posed by cooling towers, spas and whirlpool baths must also be considered.

The first step is to commission a water management risk assessment, which may also include a consideration of drinking water supplied to rooms. The risk assessment contains recommendations for mechanical works to items of plant such as tanks, pumps, cylinders and water softeners. In addition to this a written scheme, schematic diagrams and training backed up with certificates will be required – Environmental Health officers and representatives of the HSE will expect to see these.

The written scheme is at the centre of the Legionella control programme as it describes both the regular tests, checks and maintenance activities, and the actions to be taken in the event of interruption to water supplies or water heating, positive Legionella results and an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease. Again, the EHO would need to have sight of this document during any sort of investigation. Key staff will be identified and must be accountable for their areas of responsibility.

Legionella control is a continuous process: the risk assessment and written scheme should be "living documents", that is, they should accurately reflect the risks and the way in which they are controlled. The hotel water system undergoes seasonal change and must meet the demands of changing patterns of occupation. The control programme must be considered whenever alterations are made to the building or its water system. Similarly, levels of knowledge and training will fluctuate and it is important that all staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and understand how to carry out their duties.

With the increasing tendency for guests to use showers rather than baths, an ageing population with more time to travel and an increased awareness of travel-related disease, it is important for hoteliers to take the necessary precautions rigorously put in place and backed up with the appropriate training.