

17 May 2017

LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE ALERT

Our Ref: eA972133

ATTENTION: COOLING TOWER OWNERS & OPERATORS, WATER TREATMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS AND FACILITY MANAGERS

Why am I receiving this alert?

SA Health is reminding owners and operators of cooling water systems to be vigilant in ensuring cooling towers are properly operated, cleaned and maintained in accordance with the South Australian Public Health (Legionella) Regulations 2013 (the Regulations).

Since 5 May 2017, three cases of *Legionella pneumophila* serogroup type 1 infection (LP1) (commonly referred to as Legionnaires' disease) have been notified to SA Health. This follows a cluster of nine cases of Legionnaires' disease associated with the Adelaide central business district in January 2017.

What is Legionnaires' disease?

Legionnaires' disease is a type of severe pneumonia caused by breathing in small droplets of water that contain *Legionella* bacteria. Legionnaires' disease is serious but can be treated with antibiotics. Most people who become ill with Legionnaires' disease will require hospitalisation and about one in ten will die from the infection.

Outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease are often associated with complex manufactured water systems such as cooling towers, spa pools and potable waters systems used for showering. If not properly disinfected and maintained, cooling towers can become colonised with *Legionella* and are a common source of outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease.

What action should I take and what are my obligations?

SA Health is working with local councils to investigate recent cases of Legionnaires' disease and a number of cooling towers across metropolitan SA are being inspected and microbiologically tested to determine if they may be associated with recently notified cases.

Some system owners are being requested to undertake precautionary online decontaminations of their systems.

Where systems are requested or required to be disinfected or decontaminated, all actions and observations relating to system decontamination should be recorded in a maintenance report as required by Appendix C of AS/NZS 3666.3:2011.



Cooling tower owners are reminded of their obligations under the Regulations, particularly;

- > Cooling water systems must be registered annually with the local public health authority (in most cases the local council)
- > Water treatment systems are to be operating effectively at all times
- > Cooling water systems must be operated and maintained in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 12
- > Drift eliminators compliant with Regulation 8 are to be fitted to all cooling towers
- > Systems must be regularly inspected for cleanliness, damage and correct operation particularly following events or activities such as storms, power and/or water outages and nearby construction which can increase the ingress of dust and other pollutants into the system
- > Maintenance log books must be kept in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 14.

What are the penalties for non-compliance?

The Regulations carry penalties of up to \$5000 for non-compliance. The *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* carries penalties of up to \$1 million and/or ten years imprisonment apply for persons who are found guilty of causing a serious risk to public health.

Of significant concern to SA Health are reports of serious non-compliances associated with a small number of systems, including unregistered cooling towers, defective biocide systems and inadequate maintenance. Local councils are being requested to actively investigate all towers potentially linked to cases of Legionnaires' disease and to vigorously enforce compliance with the Regulations.

Where can I find out more?

For more information, visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au or contact your local council.



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17/5/17

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