

Shopping centres and Legionella control

Shopping centres with a high throughput have high levels of usage of the water system by a wide cross-section of the population. Visitors may include members of the public who, because of age, lifestyle or medical conditions are susceptible to infection. The centre operator owes a duty of care to its customers and staff to make sure that the water system does not pose a risk to their health.

The water management risk assessment will include a consideration of the drinking water supply as well as risks posed by Legionella. Wash hand basins, staff and customer showers, fountains and other water features, wash down facilities will all be considered. 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 office 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.

Visitors to shopping centres have high expectations of safety and comfort and are reassured that building managers are carrying out the appropriate checks to their building.