

Office Premises and Legionella

Owners and operators of office premises owe a duty of care to building occupants who use water services that may, if not correctly maintained, release Legionella bacteria. This can cause Legionnaires' Disease, which is potentially fatal.

Aqualogic manages all parts of the water management programme including risk assessment, written scheme, monitoring, inspections, training and remedial works.

The water management risk assessment will include a consideration of the drinking water supply as well of potential risks of Legionella. Typically, the water supply to office buildings is pumped from basement or ground level meaning that the preservation of high water quality is under the control of management. The risk assessment contains recommendations for mechanical works to items of plant such as tanks, pumps, cylinders and water softeners where bacteria, including Legionella may proliferate. A written scheme and schematic diagrams will be required, with responsibilities clearly allocated between the building operator and its staff, the water hygiene and treatment company and other contractors.

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. An Environmental Health Officer would need to have sight of this document during any sort of investigation, along with the risk assessment and site schematic. The written scheme identifies key staff and their areas of responsibility.

The risk assessment and written scheme should be treated as "living documents", accurately reflecting 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. As the building manager has an overview of all contractor activity on the site, an important component of water hygiene management is that they have undergone training both in water hygiene in general and the risks and controls specific to the building. Regular refresher training is required.

Tenants of office premises have high expectations of safety and comfort and are reassured that building managers are carrying out the appropriate checks to their building.