



Legionella – Controlling the risk



Legionella is a type of bacteria found in water systems that can cause Legionnaires' disease – a potentially fatal form of pneumonia. It thrives in warm, stagnant water and can be inhaled through water droplets from sources like taps, showers, cooling towers and air conditioning systems.

Legionellosis is a collective term for diseases caused by Legionella bacteria, including the most serious – Legionnaires' disease – and similar, but less serious conditions, such as Pontiac fever and Lochgoilhead fever.

Why it matters

- **Our responsibilities:** Our infrastructure includes buildings, depots, welfare units and mobile facilities – all of which may contain water systems vulnerable to Legionella
- **Legal duty:** Under the Health and Safety at Work Act and Coshh regulations, we must assess and control the risk of exposure to Legionella
- **Real risk:** Outbreaks have occurred in rail and construction environments due to poor maintenance or lack of awareness.

Key facts

- Bacteria multiply between 20°C and 45°C – common in many water systems
- Stagnant water in unused buildings or infrequently used outlets is a major risk
- Legionnaires' disease affects around 500 people per year in the UK, with a 10 –15% fatality rate.



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What to do



Key roles and accountabilities

Duty Holder representative

Network Rail is the legal Duty Holder as it controls the water systems on its premises. The company appoints Duty Holder Representative(s) (SIN 226) to fulfil legal obligations under HSWA, COSHH and ACoP L8. Their responsibilities include appointing Responsible Person(s) and confirming that a suitable Legionella Risk Assessment (LRA) and a Written Scheme of Control (WSoC) are in place and implemented for all water systems under their control.

Responsible Person(s)

- Are identified and formally appointed as the Responsible Person by the Duty Holder
- Are required to be trained and competent to perform the role of Responsible Manager
- Manage day-to-day control measures and compliance
- Are operationally responsible for the implementation and maintaining the Written Scheme of Control (WSoC)
- Should be involved with the LRA and reviews and suggesting improvements, but are not responsible for performing the LRA (but may do so if competent)
- Do not have to personally conduct all the tasks, which may be delegated to appropriate individuals by implementing the WSoC (cleaning, flushing, temperature control, monitoring)
- Maintain and retain relevant records
- Confirm maintenance and monitoring regimes are carried out correctly, address deviation or non-compliances promptly and report issues to the Duty Holder
- Confirm operatives and contractors working on water systems are trained and competent.

Did you know...

Some people are at higher risk (e.g. people over 45, smokers and heavy drinkers, people suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease, diabetes, lung and heart disease or anyone with an impaired immune system).



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What to do



Putting the Written scheme of control (WSoC) into action

- A Legionella Risk Assessment (LRA) must be carried out for each water system by a competent person to identify, evaluate risk and document the necessary measures to prevent, or adequately control the risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria, as required under BS 8580-1:2019 and ACOP L8
- The LRA is used to prepare the WSoC which describes exactly how the identified risks will be controlled and managed in practice
- The Responsible Person is operationally responsible for implementing and maintaining the WSoC
- The Responsible Person needs to confirm that the personnel who undertake the actions in the WSoC are trained and competent, via accredited qualifications where required (e.g. being members of the Legionella Control Association (LCA))
- A Deputy Responsible Person may be appointed to provide cover during periods of absence, such as annual leave, shift patterns and sickness.

Do

- ✓ Find out who is responsible for the water systems at your work location
- ✓ Think about any portable or remote water systems and make sure the Responsible Person has them included in their plan
- ✓ Report any signs of scale, corrosion or biofilm in water systems
- ✓ Report faults through the fault system, not just as a close call, to confirm action is taken.

Don't

- ✗ Don't assume new buildings are risk-free – commissioning must include Legionella checks
- ✗ Don't ignore a drop in water pressure – it could indicate a leak, which may cause contamination and insufficient throughput of water
- ✗ Don't ignore a drop in hot water temperature. A fault in the system could increase the risk of Legionella occurring.



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What to do



Controlling the risk of Legionella

Select the play button below to recap some of the key points.

Key points

- **Identify and assess the risk:** Conduct a Legionella risk assessment
- **Implement control measures:** Ensure action is taken to control risks
- **Monitor and record:** Prevention is an ongoing task, not just a one-off
- **Train and inform:** Ensure all relevant staff are trained and kept informed
- **Review regularly:** Reassess risks regularly and when there are changes.



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Resources



Questions to consider

- 1 Do you know who is responsible for Legionella control on your site?
- 2 How confident are you in identifying a potential Legionella risk in your work area?
- 3 Have you ever walked past a tap or shower that looked unused – did you report it?
- 4 What would you do if you noticed a strong odour or discolouration in the water?
- 5 Do you know how to report a loss of water pressure or a decrease in temperature?

Resources and support

Network Rail Standard NR/L3/CIV/164 – Legionnaire's disease – The control of legionella bacteria in water systems

[Legionella Control – Code of Conduct for Service Providers](#)

NR/SIN/226 – Legionella Risk Management in Network Rail

HSE (L8) Approved Code of Practice & Guidance: [Legionnaires' disease – The control of legionella bacteria in water system](#)



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