



Independent workplace compliance



White Paper

The importance of Legionella training: protecting people, property, and compliance

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The importance of Legionella training: protecting people, property, and compliance

Legionella bacteria present a significant health risk in water systems and can lead to Legionnaires' disease, a potentially fatal form of pneumonia. Organisations responsible for buildings and water systems have legal and moral obligations to manage these risks effectively.

Control measures need to be put in place, along with monitoring programs and water management plans are essential, but the success of any Legionella control strategy ultimately depends on the competence of the individuals implementing it.

Both the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (MHSWR) state the need for, and the importance of suitable and sufficient training. Legionella training will make sure that regulatory compliance is in place and will help protect against any potential reputational or financial impacts.

This white paper outlines:

1. [Understanding Legionella risk](#)
2. [Why does Legionella training matter?](#)
3. [Who requires Legionella training?](#)
4. [Essential components of effective Legionella training](#)
5. [Conclusion](#)

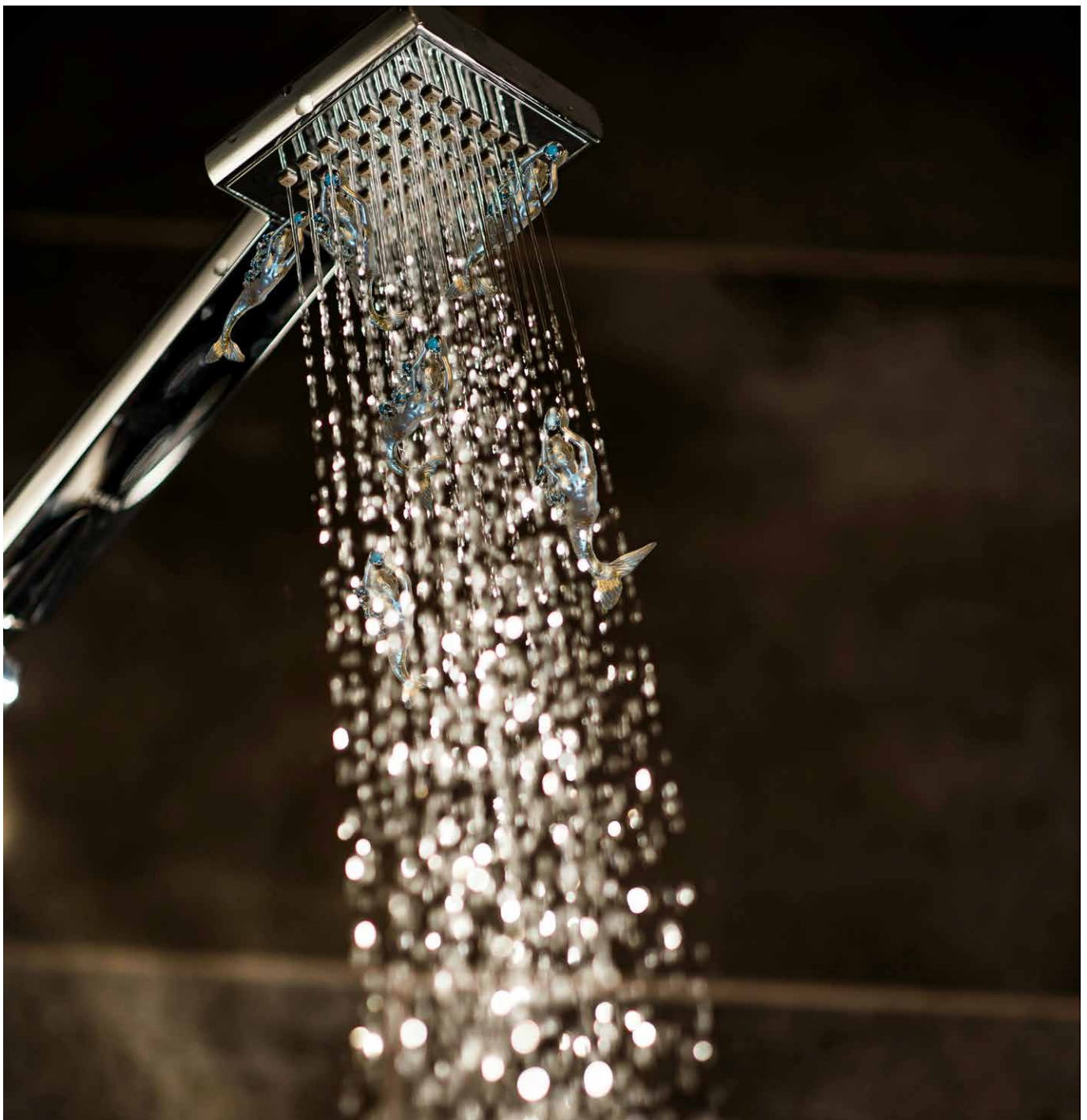


1. Understanding Legionella risk

Legionella bacteria occur naturally in water and can multiply in man-made water systems when conditions are favourable, such as suitable temperatures, lack of turnover or poorly maintained systems. These systems include domestic hot and cold systems, evaporative cooling systems, spa baths, hot tubs, water features and firefighting systems amongst others.

People become infected by inhaling fine water droplets containing Legionella bacteria, with the most susceptible being older adults (predominantly men), smokers and individuals with weakened immune systems or chronic respiratory conditions

Outbreaks can result in serious illness, fatalities, and consequently legal action, financial penalties, and lasting reputational damage.



2. Why does Legionella training matter?

1. Ensuring legal and regulatory compliance

Organisations have a duty to control risks associated with Legionella exposure. In the UK, the Health and Safety at Work Act, along with the aforementioned COSHH and MHSW regulations, place stringent duties on employers and those controlling premises to control and manage the risks from Legionella bacteria.

Training helps duty holders understand:

- Their legal responsibilities
- Risk assessment requirements
- Monitoring and inspection protocols
- Record-keeping obligations
- Corrective action procedures

Without adequate training, organisations increase their risk of non-compliance, enforcement action, and prosecution.

2. Reduces the risk of Legionnaires' disease

The primary objective of Legionella control is preventing illness and protecting lives.

Training enables personnel to:

- Identify conditions that encourage bacterial growth
- Recognise warning signs within water systems
- Perform routine monitoring correctly
- Respond quickly to system failures
- Implement effective control measures

Competent management and maintenance teams who understand the risks are more likely to detect and resolve issues before they escalate.

3. Improves water system management

Even the most robust water management plans can fail if employees do not understand their responsibilities and the reasons why tasks must be carried out. Even basic awareness training will make sure that staff can:

- Perform temperature monitoring accurately
- Conduct flushing regimes effectively
- Understand sampling requirements
- Maintain accurate compliance records
- Escalate concerns appropriately

This creates greater consistency and reliability across maintenance and compliance activities.



4. Supports a culture of safety

Training fosters awareness and accountability throughout an organisation.

When employees understand the potential consequences of Legionella exposure, they are more likely to:

- Follow established procedures
- Report abnormalities promptly
- Participate actively in risk management
- Take ownership of safety responsibilities

Organisations with strong safety cultures generally experience fewer compliance failures and operational disruptions.

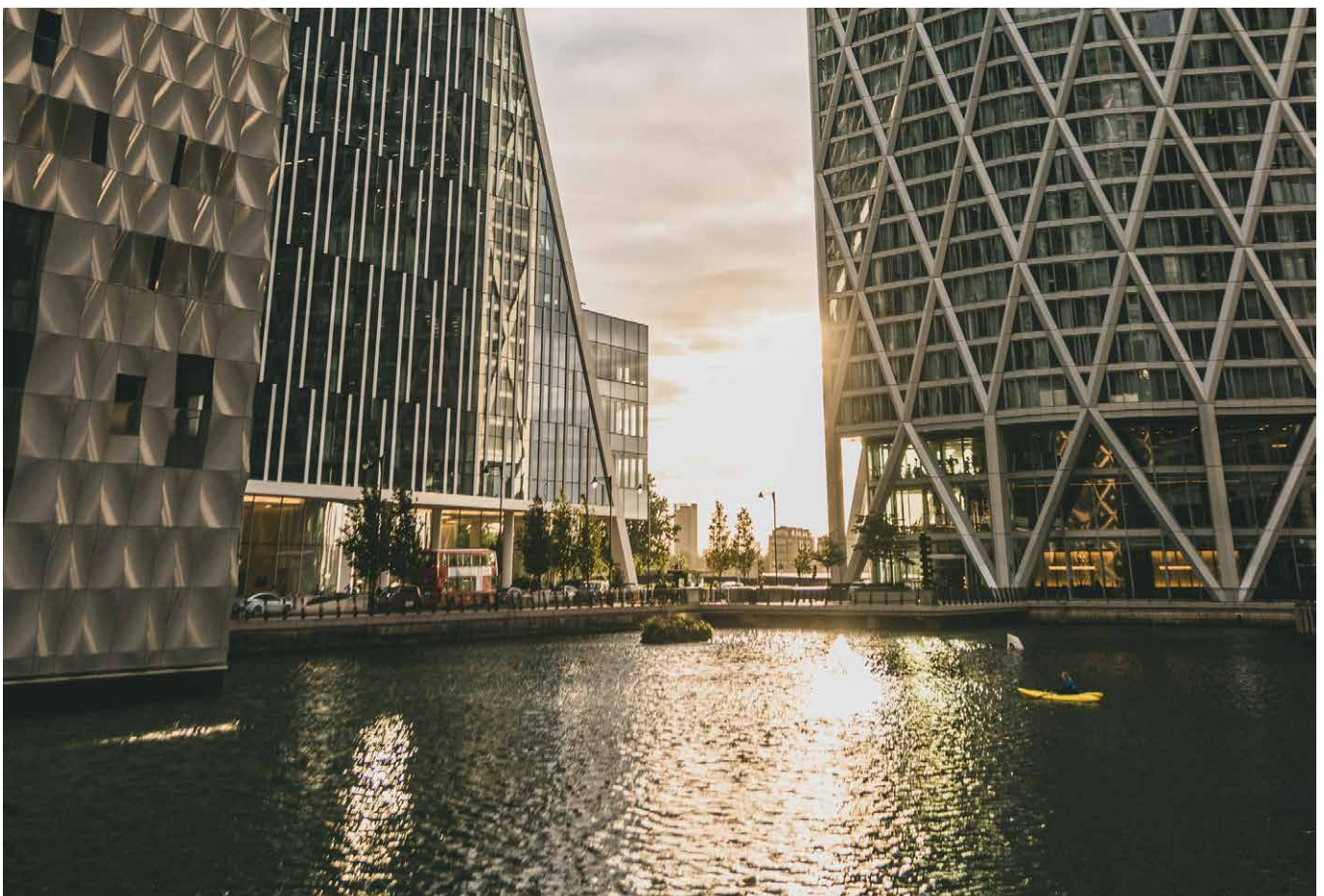
5. Protects organisational reputation

A Legionnaires' disease outbreak can attract significant media attention and public scrutiny. Potential consequences include damage to reputation, loss of customer confidence, increased insurance costs and regulatory investigations alongside civil litigation. Investing in training not only meets legal requirements but also demonstrates due diligence and commitment to protecting building occupants, employees, visitors, patients, residents, and customers.

6. Reduces financial risk

The financial impact of a Legionella incident can be substantial. This could include emergency remediation works, facility shutdowns, fines and compensation claims.

Compared to these potential costs, Legionella training represents a relatively low-cost preventative investment that can deliver significant long-term savings.



3. Who requires Legionella training?

Competency should be clearly defined for each role involved in Legionella management, from those appointing and overseeing responsible persons to those carrying out routine monitoring, maintenance and record keeping. Individuals must have sufficient knowledge, training, experience and understanding of the specific water systems they manage, as well as the authority to act when non-conformances or increased risks are identified. Competence should not be assumed following attendance on a course alone; it should be supported by practical understanding, regular review, clear lines of responsibility and evidence that duties are being carried out correctly and consistently.

- **Duty holders:** competent to understand their legal responsibilities, appoint appropriate persons, allocate sufficient resources and ensure effective oversight of Legionella risk management arrangements.
- **Responsible Persons:** competent to interpret the risk assessment, implement the written scheme of control, review monitoring results, escalate concerns and make informed decisions when control measures fail.
- **Facilities and building managers:** competent to coordinate routine controls, manage contractors, maintain records, verify that actions are completed and ensure site-specific procedures are followed.
- **Maintenance personnel:** competent to carry out practical tasks such as temperature checks, flushing, inspections, sampling support and remedial actions in line with agreed procedures.
- **Contractors and specialist providers:** competent to demonstrate suitable qualifications, experience, knowledge of current guidance and the ability to provide clear recommendations, reports and evidence of completed work.



4. Essential components of effective Legionella training

Effective Legionella training at whatever level requires engagement and discussion. Importantly, it should be specific to the systems on site and not generic. There is no point holding a discourse on cooling towers, when the site only has a domestic hot and cold-water system. Training should be done in person whenever possible to facilitate full engagement and it should cover:

- Background history - what it is, where it is found, outbreaks
- Routes of transmission
- Health implications
- Legal and regulatory requirements
- Risk assessment principles
- Water system management
- Monitoring and inspection procedures
- Record keeping and documentation
- Roles and responsibilities

Training should also be refreshed periodically to reflect changes in regulations, guidance, technology, and organisational procedures and we would recommend every 2-3 years.



5. Conclusion

Legionella training is a critical element of any effective water safety and risk management strategy. It protects people from potentially life-threatening illness, supports legal compliance, improves operational performance, and safeguards organisational reputation.

Rather than viewing training as a 'must-do' regulatory requirement, organisations should recognise it as a strategic investment in safety, resilience, and corporate responsibility. By making sure that all relevant personnel are properly trained and competent, organisations can significantly reduce the likelihood of Legionella-related incidents, whilst demonstrating a strong commitment to protecting employees, customers, and the wider community. No longer can you say, "I wasn't aware of the risk".



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