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## The Express-Times

# Former cook at Lehigh University sues school after contracting Legionnaires' disease

Thursday, December 09, 2010

By JD MALONE

The Express-Times

BETHLEHEM | A former cook at Lehigh University filed a lawsuit Tuesday claiming the university was at fault when he contracted Legionnaires' disease last year.

Jeffrey W. Kulls, of New York City, worked for Sodexo at Lehigh the summer of 2009 when Sept. 1 he came down with fever, chills, weakness, and aches and pains, according to the suit. Kulls was hospitalized for almost a month battling the disease, according to court papers, and spent time in the intensive care unit due to respiratory failure.

The suit claims Kulls contracted the disease toward the end of summer 2009 while working in the kitchen at the University Center. According to court papers, Kulls no longer works at Lehigh and cannot work due to poor health and other complications arising from his exposure to Legionnaires' disease.

The disease is a form of pneumonia, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and attacks the lungs. The bacteria that causes it lives in water and can occasionally be found in complex HVAC and plumbing systems -- such as those at hospitals, nursing homes and other large, multipurpose facilities, according to MayoClinic.com.

The disease cannot be spread from person to person and normally infects people with weakened respiratory or immune systems.

Kulls' suit says the HVAC system at the University Center harbored the disease and he was exposed to exhaust vapor, condensation or other HVAC byproducts.

Lehigh University officials declined to comment. A spokesperson said the university has not been served with the suit and was therefore unfamiliar with the case.

Kulls' attorney, Brandon Swartz, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

The suit was filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Allentown and Kulls seeks more than \$150,000 in damages.

According to the suit, Kulls still suffers from complications due to the illness, will have large medical bills in the future and has been unable to earn a living.

Legionnaires' disease, if caught early, can be cured with antibiotics, according to MayoClinic.com, but according to the CDC, 5 to 30 percent of cases are fatal.

Last week, the Care Center of Lopatcong, in Lopatcong Township, announced that a patient was diagnosed

with Legionnaires' disease.

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