

Water treatment company fined £41k

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A WATER treatment company must pay more than £41,000 for placing elderly care home residents at risk of legionnaires disease.

Deba UK Ltd, of The Metro Centre, Toutley Road, Wokingham pleaded guilty today to carrying out inadequate and misleading legionella surveys on water systems at nursing homes in Blaenau Gwent and Powys.

The surveys left vulnerable residents at the homes at a heightened risk of contracting legionnaires disease, a potentially fatal form of pneumonia.

At Abertillery Magistrates Court, the firm pleaded guilty to three charges under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. They were fined £24,000 and ordered to pay costs of £17,276.

During 2007, the company were commissioned to carry out legionella risk assessments at nursing homes operated by Craegmoor Healthcare in Tredegar and Llangattock, and rated the risk as low.

A subsequent routine check of these nursing homes revealed there to be inadequate controls for legionella at the premises, and the focus moved on to the work carried out by Deba UK Ltd.

Health and Safety inspector Matthew Hamar said: "The nursing home operators commissioned Deba UK Ltd to carry out the surveys in good faith and to help them comply with their responsibilities to manage the risk posed by legionella on their premises.

"They were badly let down in this case.

"Elderly nursing home residents are at greater risk from the bacteria that give rise to conditions such as legionnaires disease, so it is imperative that safety critical surveys like those carried out by Deba UK Ltd are adequate.

"Fortunately, there was no evidence of any outbreak of the disease as a result of these incidents, but there is a clear responsibility to those companies carrying out specialist work that they need to carry out adequate surveys and provide accurate information."

Legionnaires disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia which can affect anybody,

but which principally affects those who are susceptible because of age, illness, immunosuppression or smoking.

It is caused by legionella bacteria, which can grow in water kept at unsuitable temperatures – between 20°C and 45°C – and infect the water in cooling towers, whirlpool spas and purpose built hot and cold water systems, as found in care settings.

Where conditions are suitable for the growth of legionella the risk is increased.

There is a risk of disease when droplets of water, infected with the bacteria, are inhaled. Whilst showers may present a particular problem in care homes water droplets created from taps is also a potential source.

Any equipment that can generate water droplets that could be inhaled should be assessed for potential risk.

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