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Selfridge officials: Legionnaires outbreak traced to water cooling tower

*CANDICE WILLIAMS**The Detroit News*

Harrison Township -- Officials at Selfridge Air National Guard Base announced this morning that a water cooling tower was the source of a Legionnaires' outbreak in July that sickened seven civilian workers.

"The important thing is that they found out what the source is and the fact that everyone is all right," said 1st Lt. Anthony J. Lesterson, 127th Wing Public Affairs Officer.

The disease affected workers in two neighboring buildings, the Garrison -- where the employees of the TACOM Life Cycle Management Command work -- and the 127th Wing. The buildings have been sanitized, and employees are expected to move back in by Sept. 13, Lesterson said.

The cooling tower is part of the heating, cooling and ventilation system for the two buildings.

Legionnaires, a type of lung infection, is caused by a bacteria called Legionella, which grows best in warm water. The bacteria is inhaled, not swallowed, and can't be transferred from person to person.

The initial symptoms are similar to the flu and can escalate into pneumonia-like symptoms, such as high fever, breathing difficulty and chest pain.

The investigation team, which included two specialists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommended the base hire a contractor that specializes in Legionella mitigation. The company, Nalco, has been cleaning, sanitizing and testing the cooling tower. They will regularly maintain and monitor the system, Lesterson said.

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