

CASE STUDY: ENGINEERING FIRM IN COURT FOR LEGIONELLA FAILINGS



An international engineering firm, which refurbishes turbine blades, has been fined for failing to manage the risk to public and employees to potentially fatal legionella bacteria.

The company failed to properly manage the risk of bacteria growing in their cooling towers for over a year, from May 2011.

Derby Crown Court heard that during a visit to the company's site in May 2012, a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector felt spray on his face, saw the yard's surface was wet and that nearby cooling towers were corroded.

Corrosion can encourage the growth of legionella bacteria which is carried in water droplets. If water is inhaled which contains the bacteria, it can lead to a number of diseases, but most commonly legionnaire's disease, a potentially fatal form of pneumonia.

HSE issued four improvement notices in June 2012 requiring inlet screens to be placed on the cooling towers to stop debris falling in them which could encourage legionella growth, and for corroded items of plant to be replaced. Two similar notices were served on the company in 2008 seeking improvements on rusting towers and a number of management failures. All the notices had been complied with.

The court was told a laboratory analysis of a water sample taken from the site before the HSE investigation had found legionella bacteria levels to be so high that immediate action was required to clean the system.

As well as failing to maintain its infrastructure, the company did not keep biocides (chemicals which kill bacteria) at effective levels.

The business was fined a total of £110,000 (£55,000 for each breach) with £77,252 in costs after admitting breaching Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.