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## **Swiftclean says industry cannot afford to ignore Bulmers warning**

Legionnaires' disease is back in the spotlight following the prosecution of cider maker HP Bulmer and its specialist maintenance contractor Nalco.

Both organisations were hit with massive £300,000 fines plus £50,000 in legal costs for breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act. The prosecution came as a result of a Legionnaires' outbreak at Bulmer's factory in Hereford five years ago that left two people dead and over 20 others seriously ill.

Two cooling towers were identified as the source of the outbreak and Crown Court Judge Alistair McCreath said the hygiene programme had been "woefully inadequate". He added that the outbreak was the direct result of "oversights and the cutting of corners".

Prosecutors also pointed to an "outdated water treatment policy" and "deficiencies in staff training". They said Nalco had failed to comply with its contractual obligations to Bulmer by failing to adequately clean the towers and had also carried out an inadequate risk assessment on behalf of the drinks firm.

"This should make every specialist contractor in the country sit up and take notice," said Gary Nicholls, managing director of building services hygiene contractor Swiftclean. "There can be no hiding place for maintenance firms who fall short in their obligations to clients."

According to the Health Protection Agency, cooling towers and evaporators are the most common source of Legionnaires' outbreaks in the UK with 31 outbreaks leading to 57 deaths between 1980 and 2003. Hot water systems accounted for 24 outbreaks and 19 deaths in the same period, but tellingly 57 outbreaks leading to 25 deaths were from unknown sources.

"The widespread nature of the threat reinforces the need for comprehensive, thorough maintenance programmes," added Mr Nicholls. "Specialists need to have a good understanding of the layout of cooling and heating systems and be able to assess the risks properly."

“Issues such as long pipe runs, low water flow rates leading to stagnation points in systems, and poor water temperature control can increase the risk of an outbreak. Clients bear the ultimate responsibility for the health and safety of their staff and members of the public, but they are absolutely reliant on expert firms to provide adequate safeguards.”

Swiftclean’s expertise is in greater demand than ever, according to Mr Nicholls. He is recruiting more building hygiene specialists to cope with the rising demand for risk assessments and to put full hygiene maintenance programmes into action. However, Mr Nicholls believes that another critical element is improving the training of end users’ on-site staff.

“It is a sad fact of life that it often takes a catastrophic event to provoke the required reaction. Quite apart from the tragic loss of life in this case, the size of the fines should also motivate all building owners and operators to carry out full risk assessments and put their hygiene programmes in place.

“The fine levied on the contractor also reinforces the point that clients should only use companies who can prove their competence and track record in this particularly important and specialised area.”

For more information about legionella prevention and control, visit [www.swiftclean.co.uk](http://www.swiftclean.co.uk)

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