



December 15, 2008

To Whom it May Concern:

Due to the downturn in the economy the Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD) has received reports that hotel resorts are examining partial closures of their facilities including guest rooms as a means of cost savings. The health district would like to make you aware that the closure of rooms may increase the likelihood of your potable water system becoming colonized with *Legionella* bacteria. *Legionella* is the bacterium that causes Legionnaire's disease, which is a respiratory illness that often results in pneumonia. The disease can be contracted when a person inhales water mist or vapor that has been contaminated with *Legionella*. Those at risk of contracting the disease are older people (usually 65 years of age or older), as well as smokers, or those who have a chronic lung disease (like emphysema). People who have weak immune systems due to diseases like cancer, diabetes, or kidney failure are also more likely to get sick from *Legionella* bacteria. People who take drugs to suppress (i.e. weaken) the immune system (e.g. after a transplant operation or chemotherapy) are also at higher risk. Each year, between 8,000 and 18,000 people are hospitalized with Legionnaires' disease in the U.S. However, many infections are not diagnosed or reported, so this number may be higher. A recent study found that seasonal closure of hotels results in an increased risk of detecting *Legionella* in hotels' hot water systems.

In the past SNHD has investigated outbreaks of Legionellosis associated with the resort industry. In all cases, *Legionella* bacteria were found in the hot water systems of the implicated resorts. The health district also found that some of the hot water systems did not heat the water to a temperature sufficient to control the presence of *Legionella* bacteria. *Legionella* bacteria grow best in stagnant water with a temperature between 77-108°F. These temperatures may be reached in water systems when a resort closes sections of its facility, which may contribute to *Legionella* colonizing your hot water systems. This colonization could potentially lead to individuals becoming ill in your facility. A proper recommissioning program of your hot water system before guests are allowed to stay may be necessary to remove any *Legionella* that could have colonized your facility's system. Since each facility's plumbing system is different, there is not a standard recommissioning program that will work for all of the facilities.

If you decide to close rooms or sections of your facility for an extended period of time exceeding 30 days, please contact either your Environmental Health Specialist routinely assigned to your facility or contact either Jamie Hulbert or Rebecca Fuentes in the Environmental Health Division's Special Programs office at (702) 759-0677 to discuss what actions you plan to take to mitigate the potential hazard of *Legionella* colonization.

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