

# News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Clark County Health District Announces First-of-its-Kind Initiative for the Valley**

(Las Vegas, Nev. – August 14, 2001) - The Clark County Health District (CCHD) announces a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at preventing the occurrence of the bacteria *legionella* in the on-site water facilities of commercial properties.

The effort will focus on developing a maintenance regimen to help prevent the colonization of the naturally occurring bacteria. Specifically, the program will target such potential breeding grounds as air conditioning cooling towers and hot water heaters, where warm, still water provides conditions conducive to colonization.

“Individual cells of *legionella* really do not represent a public health threat,” Chief Health Officer Dr. Donald Kwalick, said. “However, colonies of them can cause illness, particularly in people who are older or more susceptible because they have certain chronic diseases.”

Kwalick went on to state that the key to prevention is to reduce the conditions that allow *legionella* to multiply. The Health District’s effort will focus on adopting and recommending standards that facilities can use to maintain their systems and prevent these conditions, which should virtually eliminate the problem.

The initiative comes after an investigation by the CCHD and Centers for Disease Control indicated the presence of *legionella* colonies within one of the three buildings in the Polo Towers resort property. Health officials continue to conduct tests to further isolate the bacteria’s source. Three individuals who stayed at the resort earlier this year have been diagnosed with the ailment known as Legionnaires’ disease; all have recovered.

At the recommendation of the Health District, Polo Towers has voluntarily retained an environmental science firm to assist in their remediation efforts. Polo Towers CEO Stephen J. Cloobek anticipates this process to last 24 hours and will coordinate retesting efforts with the Health District.

The Health District plans to work closely with the resort industry as a whole to develop these new maintenance standards. Public workshops will be held to garner input and support from affected parties, and the Clark County District Board of Health will hold public hearings in order to adopt new regulations.

(more)

## Fact Sheet Legionnaires' Disease

### Background

- The Clark County Health District (CCHD), along with representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), are investigating three cases of Legionnaires' disease in patrons of the Polo Towers.
- These cases occurred between February and May 2001. The three people diagnosed with Legionnaires' were from Ohio, Alaska and West Virginia.
- In the course of their local investigations the respective health departments alerted CCHD to the possibility that these cases may have originated in Clark County.
- After the second case was identified at the end of March, and a tentative link to Polo Towers established, initial testing of water supplies began in early April with a concentration on the property's four cooling towers.
- The *legionella* bacteria was found to be present in three of the four cooling towers and the property initiated remediation efforts and retesting found these steps to be adequate.
- The third case was identified on August 1, 2001 and additional testing of legionella bacteria sources was initiated.
- Preliminary results were received on August 9, 2001 and a direct link was established. The property was notified of the results and of the need to notify guests.
- On August 11, 2001 the Health District initiated a notification of the guests of Polo Towers.
- The *legionella* bacteria that causes Legionnaire's is an organism common to our environment that occurs at very low or undetectable levels in water. Under specific conditions the *legionella* bacteria may multiply and when inhaled can cause serious illness.
- Not everyone exposed to the *legionella* bacteria will get the disease, but certain people are more susceptible. Persons who are middle-aged or older, have lung or kidney disease, diabetes, cancer, immune problems including HIV/AIDS, are taking medicine for cancer or have a history of smoking are more at risk for contracting the disease if they are exposed.
- Legionnaires' is not transmitted from person to person and is treatable with antibiotics.
- Signs of the Legionnaires' usually appear within two to ten days after coming in contact with the *legionella* bacteria.
- The CDC estimates that 8,000 to 18,000 people get Legionnaires' disease in the United States each year. These cases commonly occur at random, however when an outbreak is identified an investigation is conducted to look for a possible source.

### Current Status

- The Health District and Polo Towers continue to work together and are waiting for results from additional tests.
- Management voluntarily closed floors 6-19 of the condominium's tower 2.
- Polo Towers retained the services of an environmental science firm to assist in the remediation. Once remediation efforts are completed retesting will be conducted.
- At this time ongoing tests indicate that the bacteria is not present in the water heaters serving towers 1 and 3.

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