

LEGIONNAIRES DISEASE

Expert Investigates Outbreak at Hotel Hot Tub

A man attending his high school reunion held at a national hotel chain in South Carolina was exposed to Legionella bacteria and contracted Legionnaires disease. Robson Forensic aquatics safety expert, Maria Bella, AFOIT, CPOI, LGI, was retained to determine if the operation of the hotel hot tub violated the standard of care and was dangerous in a manner that caused the transmission of Legionella bacteria.

Shortly after his visit an unidentified guest complained about getting sick after using the hot tub. The next day the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) closed the hot tub. Following this closure, the hot tub was immediately drained and cleaned by hotel staff. Fifteen people who stayed at the Hotel during the same period of time contracted Pontiac Fever and three were diagnosed with Legionnaires disease.

The hot tub was tested for Legionella bacteria. According to the SCDHEC initial report, "Positive smears were from the hot tub line and the hot tub valve and debris" and "Epidemiological evidence strongly suggests that the hot tub at the suspect hotel was the source of this Pontiac Fever and Legionnaires disease outbreak."

Analysis by our aquatics safety expert revealed that the hotel did not operate their hot tub in the proper manner. They created a dangerous condition that made disease transmission predictable. Water test logs provided by the hotel show that the hot tub chemicals were tested infrequently, generally only once per day. This is a dangerous practice because it does not provide the aquatic facility operator with enough information to insure that proper chemical levels are maintained throughout the day. Chlorine is a highly reactive chemical that must be constantly present in order to sanitize and oxidize water at recreational facilities.

By failing to properly maintain their hot tub, the hotel created a dangerous condition that caused the transmission of Legionella bacteria.