Legionnaires' Disease Outbreak

What(s)
Legionnaires' disease outbreak

When
See timeline

Underlying medical conditions/smoking makes infected individuals more susceptible; legionella resistant to chlorine

Where
Facility, site
South Bronx, New York City

Task being performed
Cooling towers

Exposure to contaminated mist

Impact to the Goals
Safety
12 deaths; 115 infected

Customer Service
Outbreak of Legionnaires’ Disease

Environmental
At least 11 cooling towers contain legionella bacteria

Property/Equipment
Increased regulation of cooling towers

Regulatory
Testing, disinfection (>350 workers)

Frequency
>260 cases of Legionnaires’ in New York City so far this year (average 200-300/ year); 4,458 cases in US in 2013 (compared to 1,127 in 2000)

Why?
Effect
Cause

For now, though the outbreak appears to be waning (no new cases have been reported since August 3), the city is playing catch-up. Though they are requiring all cooling towers to be disinfected, many of the infected have not yet been identified. The city is working to make sure that all affected buildings are tested.

Hindsight is 20-20, but it's not a new disease. And it's not like we haven't known about the risk of cooling towers, and it's not like people in New York haven't died of Legionnaires' before.’’

- Bill Pearson, member of the committee that wrote standard to address the risk of legionella in cooling towers

“Why, instead of doing a good job responding, don’t we do a good job proactively inspecting?”

- Ruben Diaz Jr., Bronx borough president

Legionnaires’ Disease
An outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease has affected at least 115 and killed 12 in the South Bronx area of New York City. While Legionnaires’, a respiratory disease caused by breathing in vaporized Legionella bacteria, has struck the New York City area before, the magnitude of the current outbreak is catching the area by surprise. (Because the vaporization is required, drinking water is safe, as is home air conditioning.) It’s also galvanizing a call for actions to better regulate the causes of the outbreak.

Copyright ThinkReliability 2015

For a free copy of our Root Cause Analysis Template in Microsoft Excel, used to create this page, visit our web site.