50 Years After the Outbreak That Changed Water Safety, the British Occupational Hygiene Society asks: Are We Doing Enough to Prevent Legionnaires' Disease?

Thursday 5 November, 2026

2026 marks 50 years since the outbreak that led to the identification of Legionella and transformed our understanding of Legionnaires' disease. Half a century later, the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) is bringing experts together to examine why controlling Legionella remains a challenge – and what needs to change.

The BOHS Legionella Conference 2026, taking place in Manchester on 24 November, will look beyond compliance to explore how Legionella risks can be better anticipated, designed out and controlled throughout the life cycle of water systems.

Since the landmark 1976 outbreak, scientific understanding of Legionella and the conditions that allow it to thrive has advanced enormously. Yet Legionnaires' disease remains a foreseeable and preventable risk, and effective management of increasingly complex water systems continues to present challenges.

As the Chartered Society for Worker Health Protection, BOHS brings an occupational hygiene perspective to the issue: focusing on recognising hazards, understanding exposure and preventing harm before it occurs.

The conference will bring together specialists from across water safety, occupational hygiene and industry to examine the practical challenges involved in effective Legionella prevention and control.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Tom Laffey, ISHEM – *Solving One Hazard, Creating Another: Legionella Risks from Wet Stone Cutting and Beyond*
- Peter Priday, Compass Group – *Trials and Tribulations of a Responsible Person*
- Jim Perry, Water Hygiene Centre – *Why Water Safety Design Reviews Are Critical*
- Anthony Matthews, Legionella Control Association – *The Legionella Control Association*

The programme will consider Legionella risk from different points in the life cycle of water systems – from design and operation to the practical realities faced by those responsible for managing risk.

The session on wet stone cutting will also highlight the interconnected nature of occupational health risks: measures introduced to control one workplace hazard can create another if health risks are not considered holistically.

BOHS CEO, Professor Kevin Bampton, said:

"Fifty years on from the outbreak that first brought Legionnaires' disease to global attention, there is still much to learn about the fascinating and deadly organism that causes it. Moreover, in the face of climate change and different ways of using and conserving both water and energy, we are likely to see increasingly new and novel causes of outbreaks. At the root of controlling this disease is better understanding and knowledge and this is why a conference that brings together practitioners, academics and regulators is even more relevant and important today as it was 50 years ago."

For further information and to book a place, visit BOHS Legionella Conference 2026

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