



# WATER COOLERS & DRINKS MACHINES

This information sheet explains the health risks of Water Coolers and Drinks Machines and what employers must do to ensure the Health and Safety of members.

In recent years there has been a huge increase in the use of water coolers and drinks machines in work-places.

Unfortunately, while these are important in supplying refreshment to our members, they also have their risks.

There have been several cases recently of drinks machines being found to be infected with harmful bacteria, including E.Coli.

This is mainly a result of a failure to clean the dispensers on a regular basis. If someone touches the spout when taking a drink, or refilling the machine, any bacteria that are left will grow.

Even when regular cleaning takes place, simple use of soap and water is more and likely to spread contamination to other machines than remove it.

If contamination gets in the workings of a vending machine it can be quite difficult to eradicate. This is particularly the case with some harmful bacteria called coliforms.

Under the workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, the employer has a responsibility to provide an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water. However any water, or other beverage, which is supplied, must be provided safely. Branches should

ensure that there is an active cleaning programme that includes disinfecting machines on a regular basis (not just the nozzle). In addition periodic testing of all drinks machines and water coolers should be arranged. Although mains fed static chilled water dispensers are probably safer, even they have to be checked on a regular basis.

If bottled water is used, it is important that the bottles are not stored for long periods beside the machine, but instead are kept in a cool dark place.

Water coolers using bottled water can also cause manual handling injuries. The standard bottle used in a water cooler weighs 18.5 kilograms. Coolers supplied by mains water prevent this risk, but if bottled water is used then only those staff who have been trained in manual handling should replace the bottles.

However employers should not be allowed to use health & safety considerations to stop providing drinks at work. If properly maintained drink dispensing machines and water coolers can be safe and are an important part of any workplace.