



KEEP RISK IN **HAND**

Following recent reports of legionnaires' disease in Scotland, landscapers need to review risk assessments relating to compost handling, which has been identified as a common link, explains **Jodie Read**

Companies employing five or more people are legally required to produce documented risk assessments. Such risk assessments should be subject to regular review, and, where necessary, be updated to include additional information. Recent reports of legionnaires' disease being associated with handling potting compost highlights the need for landscapers to review the risk assessments that they have in relation to handling compost.

Until now, manual handling was probably considered as the single most significant hazard associated with potting compost. A spate of incidents in Scotland indicate legionnaires' disease should also be considered. Some gardeners have become seriously unwell, and one person even died after contracting the disease. Handling compost has been identified as a common link.

WHAT IS LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE?

Legionnaires' disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia. Symptoms are flu-like and include fever, chills, cough, muscle pains and headaches. More severe cases may also cause diarrhoea or mental confusion. The disease does not spread from person to person.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Everyone is susceptible to infection from legionnaires' disease, although the following groups of people have been identified by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as being most at risk:

- People over 45 years of age.
- Smokers and heavy drinkers.
- People suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease.
- Any person with an impaired immune system.

ABOUT JODIE READ



Jodie Read is the Managing Director of Penarth Management Limited; a company which specialises in the provision of compliance

consultancy and training for quality, environmental, health and safety management.

Jodie and her colleagues assist companies in implementing and maintaining management systems, such as ISO9001 (Quality), ISO14001 (Environmental) or

HOW IS LEGIONNAIRES' DISEASE CONTRACTED FROM COMPOST?

The disease is most likely to have been inhaled from water droplets within the compost, but some reports indicate it can be acquired after direct contact with contaminated soil.

Although rare in the UK, the bacteria *Legionella longbeachae* is commonly found in compost in other countries, including Australia, the USA, Japan, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

CONTROL MEASURES

Stricter labelling regimes for compost have been introduced in those countries where the disease is known to have occurred in the past. Currently, there is no requirement for UK producers to apply such labels. However, anyone handling compost can introduce some simple control measures to minimise the risk of contracting legionnaires' disease from soil:

- Dampen the compost to suppress dust.
- Ensure good personal hygiene by washing hands thoroughly after handling compost and before eating or smoking.
- Consider the use of gloves.

Ensure that any control measures you introduce are documented within your risk assessment and make sure that they are communicated to the people coming into contact with compost.

UPDATING LEGAL REGISTERS

For anyone with an OHSAS18001 management system, you should also update your legal register to take account of the potential health hazards that are associated with handling compost.

OHSAS18001 (Health and Safety).

The company is an affiliate member of the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) and Jodie is one of only a few approved ROLO health and safety trainers in the country.

If readers have any queries regarding health and safety in landscaping, they are welcome to contact Jodie via e-mail:

jodie@penarth.co.uk or by telephone on 029 2070 3328.