CDTA Aims to Fix Sanitation Risk

Contaminated washer in Troy shut down after workers contract Legionnaires’ disease

By CATHY WOODRUFF, Staff writer
First published: Wednesday, August 8, 2007

The Capital District Transportation Authority is taking steps to improve sanitation of its bus washing equipment after two workers came down with Legionnaires’ disease this summer as an apparent result of breathing mist from a contaminated washer at the Troy garage.

CDTA has shut down the Troy washer and switched the washers in Albany and Schenectady to public water supplies while an investigation continues, said CDTA Executive Director Raymond Melleady.

The authority also hired a consultant, Chazen Companies of Troy, to recommend changes that will ensure better maintenance of the recycled water systems normally used, he said.

“We’ve asked them to formulate a remedy for the immediate contamination and also devise ongoing maintenance for all three sites to prevent any possibility of this happening again,” said Melleady.

Melleady said CDTA is cooperating with investigators from the state and Rensselaer County health departments and the state Labor Department’s Public Employee Safety and Health unit, who are continuing to look into the matter.

Both employees who contracted Legionnaires’, a type of pneumonia, were sick enough to be hospitalized, according to a Health Department spokeswoman, but both have been released and Melleady said both appear to be recovering.

Concerns about the Troy bus washer emerged on June 6, when there was a report of an odor and the equipment was treated with bleach, Melleady said.

The first employee to fall ill was a 60-year-old mechanic in the Troy shop, who Melleady said has been out of work since June 12.

It was not until June 29, however, that the authority’s acting director of maintenance learned that the mechanic had been diagnosed with Legionnaires’ disease. He shut down all three bus washers, which use recycled water, and the water was tested for legionella, the bacteria that cause the illness.

The results then were negative, Melleady said.

On July 20, CDTA was notified by the Rensselaer County Health Department that a second worker from the Troy depot, a 41-year-old driver, had been diagnosed with the disease. The tanks were flushed and testing was conducted again, with preliminary results coming back positive on Aug. 1 for legionella in the Troy washer, according to Melleady.

Melleady notified Troy Division workers of the findings last week in a memo distributed Thursday.

“Until the bus washer tests 100 percent clean, keeping the bus washer out of commission will prevent any possible exposure,” he wrote.

Legionnaires’ disease, also known as Legionellosis, became widely known in 1976, when many people attending an American Legion convention in Philadelphia became sick. The disease can be very serious, even fatal in some cases, but it also can be treated successfully with antibiotics, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Legionella can be spread via water in air conditioning systems, whirlpools, moist soil, taps and water tanks, but
October Meeting Details

Meetings of the San Antonio Chapter ABPA are usually held the second Thursday of every month except December. Dinner and refreshments are served at 6:00 p.m. sharp with the meeting starting at 6:30. The next meeting is:

Date: Thursday, October 11, 2007
Time: 5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Location: 6425 Evers Rd.
(Leon Valley Community Center)
Program: WWIP/Hotbox installations of backflow preventers
Meal: Provided by WWIP/Hotbox

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Store your first aid supplies in a toolbox or fishing tackle box so they will be easy to carry and protected from water. Inspect your kit regularly and keep it freshly stocked.

NOTE: Important medical information and most prescriptions can be stored in the refrigerator, which also provides excellent protection from fires.

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Individually wrapped alcohol swabs
Aspirin and non-aspirin tablets
Prescriptions and any long-term medications (keep these current)
Diarrhoea medicine
Eye drops

Dressings
Bandage strips
Ace bandages
Rolled gauze
Cotton-tipped swabs
Adhesive tape roll

Other First Aid Supplies
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Scissors
Tweezers
Thermometer
Bar soap
Tissues
Sunscreen
Paper cups
Pocket knife
Small plastic bags
Safety pins
Needle and thread
Instant cold packs for sprains
Sanitary napkins
Splinting materials

These items will form the foundation of an emergency first aid kit for your home or vehicle.
isn’t transmitted by person-to-person contact, according to the state Health Department and CDC. Nationally, between 8,000 and 18,000 people are hospitalized with Legionnaires’ disease each year, according to the CDC. Some 345 cases were reported last year in upstate New York, up from 240 the year before, said Health Department spokeswoman Claire Pospisil.

“We have been identifying more cases of Legionnaires’ disease,” Pospisil said. The department issued new guidelines to hospitals on testing for the disease in 2005, and “that has resulted in increased awareness and increased testing,” she said.

Health officials say the vast majority of Legionnaires’ cases are individual, isolated cases and outbreaks of two or more cases are rare.

Pospisil said she was not aware of other cases anywhere that have been traced to contaminated water in car-washing equipment.

She said there is no reason to believe bus riders are at risk.

Steven Green, president of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1321, which represents CDTA employees, speculated treating the washing system with bleach in June masked the problem when the Troy washer first was tested.

Green reported the union’s concerns to the state Labor Department earlier this summer and said Tuesday he’d like to see all employees tested for the illness.

The Labor Department’s investigation into potential violations of health and safety regulations for public employees continues, said department spokeswoman Marie Murray.

Green said both employees who contracted the disease were cigarette smokers, a factor that health officials say can make people more vulnerable to infection, and the mechanic’s work station is close to the carwash.

It’s less clear how the driver might have been infected.

“When the bus washer is operated, the pre-rinse and the post-rinse are both fine mists, so if you’re walking past the bay in the depot, you can be exposed -- even if you’re walking outside the door,” said Melleady.

Typically, some 50 to 60 vehicles are washed each day at the Troy depot, Melleady said. The Troy buses now are being washed at the Albany and Schenectady locations.

“I know that the Troy facility is safe. We’ve eliminated the root cause of the illness. We eliminated it as soon as we were aware that there was a problem,” he said. “This illness is treatable with antibiotics, and CDTA is taking appropriate measures to prevent any future occurrences.”

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EKATERINBURG, July 30 (Itar-Tass) - One hundred and five people have been hospitalized already with the suspected diagnosis of pneumonia in the city of Verkhnaya Pyshma in the Sverdlovsk region.

An official of the regional Health Ministry told ITAR-TASS on Monday that the diagnosis of pneumonia had been confirmed in 96 people.

Six patients are staying in an intensive care unit. All are local residents. Their age ranges from 18 to 81 years.

Most of the patients showed improvement during therapy, the official said. Laboratory tests revealed a causative microorganism called Legionella.

Legionella pneumonia was first registered in the US 30 years ago.

Pulmologists, resuscitators, radiographers, bacteriologists and nurse personnel from several regional medical centers were sent to Verkhnaya Pyshma.

A group of specialists from federal research institutes are working in the city hospital. Patients are receiving antibiotics.

The pneumonia outbreak was registered in Verkhnaya Pyshma on July 25. Three people died. Specialists presume that infection spread through the water supply system after pressure tests of it. They said this infection is not transmitted from man to man. Legionella bacterium dies during water boiling. “Most likely, the patients used the not boiled water,” the regional Health Ministry’s official said.

The prosecutor’s office of the Urals Federal District took the investigation of the pneumonia outbreak under special control.
Now, a few words from your ABPA-SA chapter president....... 

Hal Haas, the new ABPA Region 4 Director, requested an annual report from each Region 4 chapter. He is “new” because the “old” Director won an uncontested election to ABPA National Vice President. Hal was asked to submit a Region Director report at the mid-year Board of Directors meeting at the Western Regional Backflow Conference in Las Vegas on September 30th. There was nothing in our chapter’s president continuity folder on this so here’s what was sent. I hadn’t realized all that happened this last year until then. I’d like to thank Bill Hamrick, who was a tremendous help in editing and kept me grounded in the facts. Scott Okland and Charlie Trowbridge provided the numbers I so dearly love.

2007 Annual Report for the San Antonio Chapter of the American Backflow Prevention Association

By trade, I’m a high school math teacher but have been a licensed irrigator since 1995 and BPAT since 1997. You will see my love for numbers. You are cordially invited to any of our meetings. The ABPA Vice President regularly attends. : ) In no particular order:

Our Website: We totally updated the chapter website. Please visit www.abpa-sa.org and you’ll see that it has a lot more color, much better organized, and will be easier to update.

Our Outreach: Chapter members, who work for the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) Backflow Prevention Section, hosted a nationally recognized Cross-Connection Control Specialist course at Dos Rios Water Recycling Center, facilitated by the University of Southern California’s Foundation for Cross-Connection Control and Hydraulic Research (USC FCCHR) from August 6 – 10. The USC FCCHR, recognized worldwide, is the leading authority in testing and training for cross connection control/backflow prevention in the industry. This course previously had been offered only one other time in Texas. Professional training was provided for 30 of which 18 were from all over the nation. In attendance were individuals from Maryland, The Centers for Disease Control (based out of Florida), various military establishments, school districts and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The course covered national and state requirements in the area of Cross-Connection Control in accordance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, TCEQ and the Uniform Plumbing Code. The USC FCCHR said they want to conduct the course very soon again in San Antonio.

Our Elections: Annual elections were this month. Reelected: Greg Shean, President; Mark Ochoa, 1st Vice President; Dan Fernandez, 2nd Vice President; and Scott Okland, Secretary. Our Treasurer, Jeff Hoffman, for more years than I can remember, resigned due to Cub Scout duties. He will be one of our 13 Directors at Large. Troy Baird was elected Treasurer.

Our Meetings: We have averaged 53 active ABPA members at our monthly meetings. We have had vendors sponsor the last 11 of our monthly meetings. We do not meet in December. We use pre-printed ABPA member sign-in sheets at the end of our meeting and training sessions for Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester, 125% for Customer Service Inspector, 100% for Licensed Irrigator, 100% for Water Operator, and 40% for Waste Water Operator. The percentages are based on average annual requirements. Our meetings are recorded and can be downloaded at http://www.abpa-sa.org/meetings/meeting.html. This last year we have had contractors come from California, Georgia, and North Carolina to provide training. Besides their travel costs and training they provide, they sponsor the meal and raffle. We must be doing something good here – or so our past PACE Awards tell us. The only city named chapter such awarded.

Our Membership: We have 242 members on the rolls with 153 having current with dues paid for the San Antonio chapter and ABPA national. Of the 242 members, 212 have BPAT licenses, 25 have CSI licenses, 36 have Water Operator licenses, and 41 have irrigator’s licenses.

Our Pride: One of our chapter members, Bruce Pearson, organized the 40 session technical track at the ABPA’s 23rd Annual Education Conference & Trade Show in Reno Nevada as Technical Sessions Chair. In addition, Bruce Rathburn of our chapter was elected Vice President of the ABPA at the national conference. Although it was a lot of work and persistence, the chapter is especially proud of what these two professionals have brought to the chapter and the backflow prevention industry.

Our Risk: Bruce Pearson had a new venue for the last day of ABPA’s 23rd Annual Education Conference & Trade Show. He had two attorneys present a mock case of liability that could have possibly involved the plumber and the water purveyor. The attorneys argued the case with jury selection, testimony, and a verdict by the jury. The thought behind the last half day was to present something different that might leave early. We were happy that the session began with 174 people and ended four hours later with 158 still in the session.

Our Trivia: Do you remember the movie where Hal was a computer that was going to take over the world?

Greg Shean
President
ABPA-SA
ABPA - SA Chapter

ELECTION SLATE
October 2007
Prepared and Presented by the Election Slate Committee
Committee Members- Ron Renouf (chair), Scott Okland, and Frank Snyder

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8) Gauge Testing and Certification – Bill Hamrick
9) Public Relations/ Speakers/ Program Topics – Manny Hernandez
10) Webmaster – Matthew Wilgen

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To be elected in 2007 for a two year term
1) Fred Baird
2) Tony Garza
3) Jorge Lopez
4) Jeff Meeks
5) Johnnie Ivy, Jr.
6) Robert Stricker

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NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

EDITOR        BRUCE RATHBURN
ASST. EDITOR   ALL BOARD MEMBERS (assigned monthly duty)
Chris, with **American Automatic Sprinklers**, recently had his van broken into and his testing device stolen. **Backflow Testing Brand: Midwest, Serial number 225219.** His telephone number is 789-1225, please contact him if you have any further questions.

**Backflow Trivia Answer:**

Yes, under HB 1656 passed into law June 18, 2007 TCEQ will be setting up the criteria for a Licensed Irrigation Inspector inside and outside the city limits. (More ground rules to follow)

**Gauge Stolen**

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“The Direct Connection” is published monthly and may be obtained by becoming a member of the ABPA-SA. Due to the expenses associated with printing and mailing, future editions will be mailed to members only. Opinions or facts within “The Direct Connection” are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the American Backflow Prevention Association and may or may not represent an official policy. Additionally, the opinions or facts of contributors or advertisers may or may not represent an official policy.

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For further information about ABPA, contact: Bruce Rathburn 3930 E. Houston (210) 704-1751
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To join the American Backflow Prevention Association, simply fill out the membership application form and mail it with your check to the address listed below, or if paying by credit card you may fax the completed form to 979.846.7607. Annual dues for individual membership is $50.00. Local chapters have additional fees. Below is a listing of chapters by region. To find out if there is a local chapter in your area please review the chapter information on our website at abpa.org or call the National Office at 979.846.7606.

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