Legionella

Legionella is a bacteria commonly found in water sources and was first identified in 1976 at an American Legion Convention at Philadelphia in the USA - when 29 people died as a result. It can cause Legionnaires disease and Pontiac Fever – both respiratory illnesses although the former is the most dangerous

There were 284 cases of Legionnaires Disease reported to Public Health England (PHE) in the UK in 2013. 11% of these cases resulted in death

Whilst there have been a number of well publicised cases involved with public buildings or associated equipment such as cooling towers across the world – there are few statistics about possible private residential contamination; however, depending on how the hot and cold water systems in houses are used – there can at times, be significant risks of this; that is why a new government initiative, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 has been established to identify possible problem areas and advise on ways to minimise the risk.

Legionella Pneumophila poses the most significant risk to humans and when breathed in can be very dangerous and cause a pneumonia type lung infection; if not diagnosed early there is a high risk that it can be fatal; whilst Legionella bacteria is present in small amounts in most water supplies, under certain (ideal) conditions relating to lack of movement, temperature and the existence of other matter being included in that water supply (such as scale) – it can double in quantity within a 12 hour period; so a house left empty for as little as a few weeks can present an ideal opportunity for the bacteria to reach dangerous levels.

This is where advice to owners, purchasers or tenants can be helpful so as to minimise any risks of contamination; a Risk Assessment of any property will highlight possible areas of danger and provide guidance as to how to best manage any risks associated with living at that property; a simple monitoring/ management programme would be set in place which would be shared between the owner or managing agent and the tenant.