

Health**Hundreds exposed to deadly disease**

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More than 500,000 customers were exposed to the risk of Legionnaires' disease at a DIY store.

B&Q was fined £20,000 by magistrates in South Gloucestershire on Tuesday after they heard its Longwell Green store had a working spa pool on display which contained water contaminated with the potentially lethal bacteria.

Health inspectors from South Gloucestershire Council investigating an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in the district tested the pool and discovered the form of pneumonia in the water.

The Hampshire-based company admitted breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act by exposing staff and customers to the risk of Legionella pneumophila.

North Avon magistrates fined the DIY giant the maximum amount they could for breaching the regulations and ordered them to pay the council's costs of £8,405.20.

Juliet Gill, prosecuting for South Gloucestershire Council, said approximately 510,000 people could have been subjected to Legionnaires' disease during the time the spa pool was in operation.

But she said there have been only two cases of Legionnaires' in the district since 2005.

The Department of Health described Legionnaires' Disease as "a potentially fatal form of pneumonia which can affect anybody, but which principally affects those who are susceptible because of age, illness, immunosuppression and smoking."

A B&Q spokeswoman said: "B&Q pleaded guilty at North Avon Magistrates' Court to a breach of the Health and Safety at Work Act. As a result of the breach at its Longwell Green store, in April 2005, the company has been fined £20,000.

"B&Q would like to assure its customers that the health and safety of its customers and employees is of the utmost importance. We are not aware of any sickness reported by customers or employees as a result of this breach."

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