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Take Steps to Prevent Water Quality Issues Before Your Business Reopens

BURLINGTON, VT – State officials are urging owners and managers of buildings that have been closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to take steps that can prevent illnesses associated with stagnant water in plumbing systems.

The Departments of Health and Environmental Conservation have set up a website where building and facility managers can access guidance and recommendations for actions to take before a building's drinking water is used again: dec.vermont.gov/water/COVID-19-Response-and-Resources

When buildings close, or are empty for long periods of time, it can affect drinking water quality and lead to health issues unrelated to the new coronavirus. Schools, offices, retail businesses, gyms and other buildings that are preparing to reopen their doors as Vermont begins to restart, should follow the state recommendations.

Stagnant water can lead to the growth of Legionella and other bacteria, which can cause Legionnaires' disease or other diseases. Stagnant water can also cause corrosion of plumbing — which can release metals such as lead and copper into the water — or lead to an increase in disinfection byproducts.

To ensure your facility is safe, take these steps before re-occupancy:

- Develop a water management plan — this should reflect the building's unique characteristics and include actions like flushing pipes regularly and ensuring water is kept at the proper temperature.
- Check the system integrity — Inspect mechanical and plumbing components and check wastewater systems.
- Flushing — Running water through the system clears out the old, low quality water that accumulated during low or no use.

Lodging facilities should make sure they are meeting all drinking water quality standards, which are outlined in licensing rules.

Buildings with specific features — such as cooling towers, hot tubs, pools, decorative water fountains, fire sprinkler systems — may need to take additional steps to keep these features clean and well-maintained.

For more information, guidance and recommendations, visit dec.vermont.gov/water/COVID-19-Response-and-Resources

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers guidance for reactivating plumbing systems after dormant conditions: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html

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