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## WATER & WASTE MANAGEMENT, RECYCLING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

# Drinking water and disease outbreaks – learning from past incidents

Dr Michael Lawrence, an accredited Drinking Water Auditor and Senior Scientist at Brisbane engineering firm, Bligh Tanner, explains why all councils across Queensland should be assessing their drinking water plants and plans.

Treated drinking water in Australia is safe to drink. All of us work on that assumption – but it may not be, unless there is appropriate management and treatment.

Outbreaks of waterborne diseases, such as *Cryptosporidium*, *E. coli*, and *Salmonella*, have affected drinking water supplies in Western countries, including Australia.

Many of these outbreaks have resulted in serious illness and, in some cases, death, highlighting the critical importance of assessing and improving drinking water plants and plans to ensure the protection of public health.

There are always multiple factors that result in waterborne disease outbreaks; however, most can be avoided.

Typical causes include not responding to raw

water risks, not maintaining assets, and not operating treatment barriers effectively.

Could your community be affected? Absolutely. In the past decade, customers have fallen ill from drinking water in Queensland.

However, you can avoid this by implementing an effective risk-based management plan, known in Queensland as a Drinking Water Quality Management Plan.

All councils that provide drinking water in Queensland have this plan. But is it enough? In most cases, it is not.

The plan needs to be adopted and implemented throughout your organisation, from the CEO down to the operator.

What happens in your drinking water systems? Are all risks managed?



Bligh Tanner can help you identify where your greatest risks lie, and assist in providing solutions that will ensure the health of your community is protected.

Contact Bligh Tanner for more information. ■