

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, September 3, 2008

CONTACT: Jim Mirando, Executive Director

Elmira Housing Authority (607 737-7100)

Elmira Housing Authority has been working actively with Chemung County and NYS Health Departments since Mr. Mirando first reported a cluster of pneumonia cases in Flannery residents to the County. The Elmira Housing Authority greatly appreciates all of the assistance provided by both of these Health Departments.

On August 22 the Chemung County health department recommended that Elmira Housing Authority hire a Legionella consultant. Mr. Mirando took action without delay. "At this point, we are taking every precaution to ensure the health, welfare and safety of our residents and employees. We plan to continue to communicate our findings and do everything within our power to eradicate the bacterium within the facility." The Authority identified one consultant, Tim Keane of Legionella Risk Management, Inc. (www.legionellae.org) with extensive experience in this area and immediately contracted with him.

Mr. Keane has worked with many facilities in Upstate New York on outbreak investigations as well as proactive building risk assessments. He presented a seminar on Legionella which was sponsored by the University of Rochester, Strong Memorial Hospital, Western New York Healthcare Association, Rochester Regional Healthcare Association and the Genesee Valley Healthcare Engineers. Mr. Keane is coauthor of the ASHE / JCAHO Regulatory Advisory "Waterborne Pathogens - Compliance with JCAHO Requirements" and is on the ASHRAE committee rewriting the most recognized Legionella guidelines, the ASHRAE guidelines titled "Minimizing the Risk of Legionellosis Associated with Building Water Systems". Mr. Keane has worked with many health departments. When South Dakota had a community wide outbreak of Legionnaires' disease and could not identify the source after several months of investigation the State contracted Tim Keane who resolved the issue within a matter of weeks. He has written many papers on the issue and has cowritten papers with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Johns Hopkins Hospital. Additionally, the State of South Dakota contracted Mr. Keane to write the only existing guidelines for control of Legionella in Ornamental Fountains.

On August 26th Mr. Keane began an investigation of the Edward Flannery Towers, met with the Housing Authority Board of Directors, the Chemung County Health Department and the Siemens Corporation which is in the process of designing upgrades already planned for the hot water system. On August 27th Mr. Keane spoke to more than 120 residents of Flannery Towers for about 15 minutes and answered questions for an additional 45 minutes. He talked about what the Elmira Housing Authority is doing in response to the outbreak. He informed residents that buildings which have one outbreak are at risk for future outbreaks and that the Elmira Housing Authority has contracted with him to not only manage the present situation but also to consult with Siemens Corporation on design upgrades and to monitor and oversee sampling and control measures over the next 12 months. He praised the Elmira Housing Authority for its commitment to address this issue for the long term protection of residents. The program received enthusiastic feedback from attending residents.

On August 29th Mr. Keane issued a Legionella Update to residents of Flannery Towers. This three page document detailed key items discussed during the August 27th resident Q&A program. These items focused on safe, practical and simple Infection Control Measures that residents could implement to reduce the risk for waterborne and airborne environmental infections including but not limited to Legionella. Mr. Keane is developing a water sampling / testing regime for the next 12 months to verify and document that implemented measures are effectively providing safe drinking water.

On September 2nd Mr. Keane met with the Flannery Towers Residents Committee and on September 3rd held another meeting open to all residents to discuss any comments on the meeting the previous week and the follow-up Legionella Update. The Residents committee stated that the meeting and document were well received. Their only comment was if the Elmira Housing Authority also plans for Mr. Keane to assess Bragg Towers and Hoffman Plaza. Mr. Keane stated to the committee,

“No doubt the major root cause of this outbreak was not the design or operation of Flannery Tower building water systems but rather the water main break which occurred within a few yards of the Flannery Towers. This break resulted in very dirty water being circulated in the building for many hours and turbid water for more than a day. Water main breaks are one of the leading causes for Legionnaires’ disease outbreaks. High rise buildings with central hot water systems do have an increased risk for Legionella colonization.”

Mr. Keane recommends that when a water main break occurs in the future the Water Authority should recognize there may be a pathogenic form of Legionella in the water main piping sludge accumulation and that they should alert building owners to the increased risk for Legionella related issues with the following recommendations;

- 1) Valve off the building water supply and flush out the line from the water main to the building water at the first strainer or valve available until the water is completely clear
- 2) Immediately flush lines in the building to eliminate any turbidity which may have occurred from losing water pressure and
- 3) Recognize that if building water is at all turbid there is a significantly increased risk for Legionella.

Additional information and County Press releases can be found on the Chemung County website

<http://www.chemungcounty.com/index.asp?pageID=10>