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News

Council manager is charged over deaths

A SENIOR council official has been charged with manslaughter over the outbreak of Legionnaires' Disease in Barrow two years ago.

Gillian Beckingham, design services manager with Barrow Borough Council, has been bailed to appear before magistrates on February 24. Seven people died and 170 fell victim to the illness during the outbreak in 2002 which was traced to a 30 year-old air conditioning plant at the council run Forum 28 arts complex.

Tom Campbell, chief executive of Barrow Borough Council, said: "We are seeking legal advice and we do not feel it is appropriate to comment further at this time." Cumbria Police also served summonses on Barrow Council, citing the same seven counts of manslaughter, the first time a local authority has faced charges of this kind.

A Cumbria Police spokesman said: "A decision was made to go ahead with the charges following discussions with the Health and Safety Executive and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Ms Beckingham, 45, and the authority are also accused of breaching the Health And Safety At Work Act.

Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia that is caused by Legionella, a bacterium found primarily in warm water environments and the disease develops within two to ten days after exposure.

It was first discovered in 1976 in Philidelphia, USA when members of the American Legion attending a conference in the city became ill.

There are about 200 cases of Legionnaires' disease a year in England and Wales but most infections are isolated.

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