

Safety first in water coolers

Supplying to so called 'high risk' areas such as hospitals and schools presents a host of challenges to any water cooler supplier – these types of establishments have strict regulations in place and coolers need to be fully compliant, not only to ensure that regulations are adhered to, but to ensure that the safety of the public is maintained.

For this **cooler innovation** Focus, Editor Hannah Oakman spoke to distributors and manufacturers working hard to boost hydration and eliminate the risks.

The smart approach to schools

Diane Jackson from UK distributor **Water Smart** explains the ins and outs of supplying water coolers to schools.

Established in 2003, Water Smart, based in England's North West region, specialises in the installation of drinking water systems in all types of schools from primary age up to senior school and special schools.

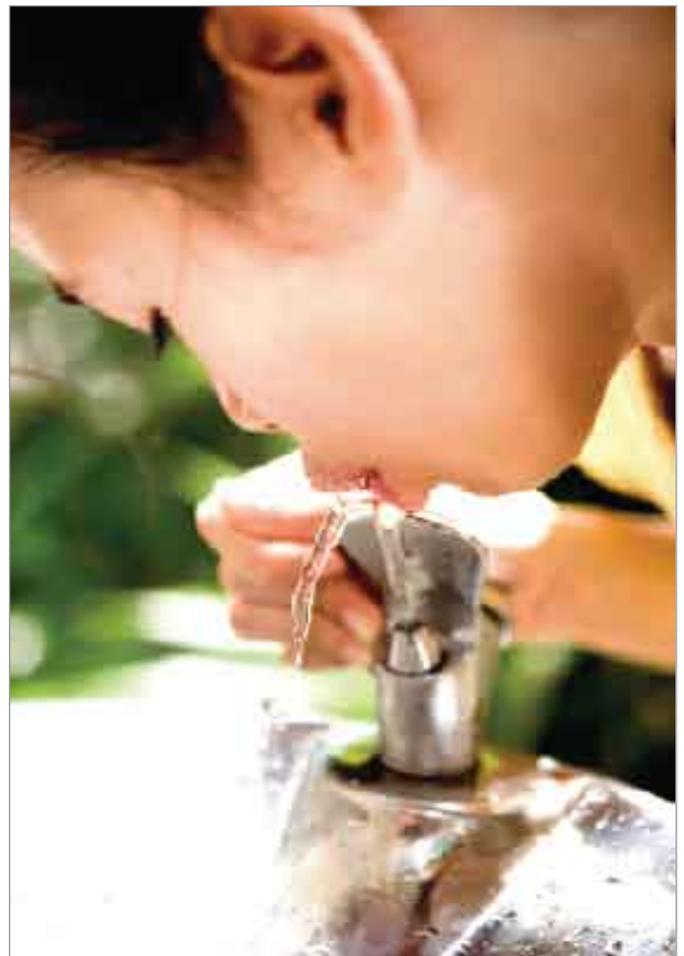
As Diane explained: "I have worked with health advisors and school nurses since 2000, having worked previously for one of the national water cooler companies. I found I had a great interest in schools and the real issues around how pupils had to struggle to get a drink of water during the day.

"I felt, however, that I could not dedicate my whole time to the problems that were actually coming to light through my work with schools while working for

this company, and I found it a little frustrating.

"In the beginning, I felt there was an absolute necessity to improve drinking water conditions in schools. Back then, schools thought that if they had a bottled water cooler in the staff room, this was all they needed to make them a 'healthy school'. However, I believed the problem was that children could only have a drink in toilet areas or from old fashioned water fountains and this was unfair.

"There was much room for improvement and with the establishment of Water Smart in 2003, we decided our company would specialise in the needs of schools and offer a first class service for each individual school.



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A competition winner at one of Water Smart's schools

"When we opened, primary schools were just starting to get on board with healthy hydration messages, but secondary schools and specialist education centres were quite reluctant because they thought it would be chaos to have a water cooler in these areas.

"But over the last couple of years we have found secondary schools are busier and we have spent lots of time in the school holidays

installing coolers into secondary schools. We try to do installations which work best for the school, working on the weekend when schools close.

"We offer a basic type of water cooler for a staff room or where there is not going to be a huge amount of usage. In some locations though, especially in secondary schools, we will advise the school to install a cooler that will cope

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Diane Jackson (centre) with competition winner and Headteacher at Bradley Primary School, Nelson

with their needs, something sturdy and robust which will dispense enough chilled water and that cannot easily be tampered with by inquisitive children. In secondary schools, we use the EcoSpa: it's a very robust British made machine which we feel is best for the job.

"In recent years we have found that a lot of water cooler companies are just not looking after schools. They sell into schools and then forget about them. You can't generalise about schools as a sector as every

one is different. A site survey is vitally important and we do this for free. The important thing is to listen to what the schools really want and offer the on-going support and advice. For example, telling them about sports bottles rather than cups and so on.



AA First cooler in school

How does drinking water improve learning?

- The key to boost learning is to keep well hydrated throughout the day.
- When we are thirsty, mental performance including memory, attention and concentration can decrease by about 10%
- Pupils concentrate better because they are not distracted by the effects of dehydration such as thirst, tiredness and irritability
- Can aid behaviour management by helping to settle pupils in the classroom.



"I get a real buzz when I get a call from a school that has just had an install, telling me how happy they were with the work carried out by our guys – it means a lot to me.

"Water Smart's aim is to continue looking after schools as we do now. We have just moved into a new unit in Blackburn and we want to continue to expand as we have over the last five years.

"We are a small, family run company recognising the needs of our customers. We now have around 400 customers, the majority of which are schools and



we are lucky to be growing organically, via word of mouth.

"We have our North West base and it is our aim to grow – perhaps one day there will be Water Smart branches in other parts of the country. My dream has always been to make Water Smart a franchise organisation. But for the moment I am just happy offering a great service to schools in a job that I love!" ■

Beat the cooler vandals with Acrokool

UK manufacturer Acrokool supplies a number of products to accommodate high risk and high demand areas.

Firstly the **Kiwa** approved Spa Range of coolers and Slimline Fountains are not only direct chill – coil on coil technology, ensuring a good output of water (24 and 30 litres an hour at incoming water temp of 21° C and air temp of 28° C) but also ensure a totally sealed unit, meaning quality of supply is not at risk from introduction of outside impurities.

Awkward or demanding locations can be satisfied by adding the following optional features:

- standard vandal proof dispensing buttons
- vandal proof screws
- wall bracket and service ducting to cover and maintain all service connections
- deep dispensing area to accommodate sports bottles and jugs
- integral cup dispenser,

loose or fixed drip tray and gravity fed or pump waste options.

The Elkay Fountain range is not only high output and practical but comes with Anti Bacterial Flexiguard Plastic bubbler instead of metal making the risk of contact accidents less likely.

As Sales Director Kevin James pointed out: "As customers become more aware of the risks and downfalls of buying / renting standard dispensers, our business in these products is growing. I still believe though, as an industry, we are under selling our potential and should be confidently offering a choice. We strongly recommend that distributors are not afraid to offer a wider selection of products to enable the customer to choose a quality that best suits the application." ■

Choice and flexibility for water provision

The National Health Service (NHS) in the UK has worked hard to agree a pan government water coolers and dispensers framework agreement.

In February 2006, the Office of Government Commerce asked the NHS purchasing agency, NHS PASA, to lead a pan government sourcing initiative. The agency has now awarded a new framework agreement for water coolers and dispensers. The new framework places greater emphasis on the provision of point of use (POU) water coolers reflecting spending patterns and the shift from bottled water coolers to POU.

Choice and flexibility

Bottled water coolers and consumables have also been included in the agreement, to provide for those settings and facilities within which no other systems can be fitted. By providing this flexibility and choice to end users, the agreement enables NHS

trusts and public sector organisations to fulfil their obligations in the provision of drinking water for staff, patients and the public.

There is a legal requirement to provide access to fresh drinking water for staff and the public in the many different healthcare settings and facilities across the NHS and wider public sector. From ward level, patient waiting areas, staff restrooms and offices; accessibility must be provided for.

Importance of water provision in the NHS

The NHS is one of the biggest consumers of water, with hospitals using many millions of litres each year to perform their function. The provision of fresh water is essential within the healthcare environment for



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good hydration of patients and can aid recovery.

Another factor is the trend away from bottled coolers to mains fed water coolers for NHS trusts which derives from infection control considerations. Bottled water coolers could pose a higher risk of cross-infection and contamination within the hospital environment and infection control departments seek to limit their use within clinical areas.

Improved supplier management

The previous framework agreement for the provision of water coolers and dispensers proved to be very popular across the NHS with uptake and value of spend through the contract increasing considerably over its lifetime.

The new framework will provide effective supplier management through service

level agreements and key performance indicators to ensure that any transactional and process costs associated with water cooler and dispenser provision are minimised as much as possible. Only suppliers that are accredited to the trade association are included.

Re-tendering gave the opportunity to make significant improvements to the specification for the new framework. It was produced by a pan government stakeholder group allowing best practice to be shared. Representatives included the Ministry of Defence, Her Majesty's Prison Service, Department for Work and Pensions, DCSF and the Office of Government Commerce buying solutions.

Flexible pricing options

NHS PASA has negotiated a wide range of volume / commitment based discounts with its participating

Key benefits at a glance

- Demand for choice is met - access to both POU and bottled water coolers under one agreement.
- Flexible procurement options - purchase and rental options for both POU and bottled water coolers.
- Government departments and NHS trusts can take advantage of not having to tender their requirements individually, saving duplication of effort and manpower.
- All suppliers will adhere to one set of government terms and conditions and not numerous terms and conditions as is currently the case.
- Better management of the market and the supply chain as suppliers are no longer able to exploit fragmented approach to procurement.
- Improved pricing and discount structure.

suppliers. The range of discounts negotiated, benefit a number of different scenarios ranging from small orders to large schemes.

The discount bandings based on commitment / volume of business, that allow for economies of scale. Other discounts are available including early settlement discounts and discounts for innovative payment methods such as Purchase to Payment (P2P) and consolidated invoicing.

Bigger saving for MOD

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) spends approximately £2 million per year on water cooler products. Many of the units within MOD have welcomed the framework as a way of reducing the

number of transactions unprotected by formal public sector terms and conditions.

The NHS PASA framework has also provided the mechanism for allowing MOD customers to migrate from bottled water coolers to mains fed solutions. Benefiting from pan government purchasing power in this market, the MOD is expecting to save a minimum of £250,000 per year on price with further savings of up to 60% from migrating to mains fed solutions. ■

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Richard Branson issues NHS infection call

Sir Richard Branson has accused politicians of "tinkering" with infection control in hospitals. The recently appointed Vice-President of the Patients Association would like all hospital staff to be screened for MRSA, and treated immediately if infected.



Sir Richard has also called for managers who fail to enforce patient safety standards to be sacked.

Across the UK, MRSA rates are falling, but Sir Richard wants to see a much tougher line. He said: "There have been some improvements, but the facts speak for themselves – and the facts are still horrific. "

Working with the Patients' Association, Sir Richard is organising an international conference in 2009 to examine what works best in infection control and patient safety. He will make recommendations to the government.

A spokesman for the Department of Health in England said: "The government is taking tough actions in the fight against infections. These are clearly making an impact as we have halved MRSA infections since 2003/04 and C. difficile infections are down 35% on the same quarter last year."

Medical world backing for BioCote

Following a study in 2008 which proved the effectiveness of BioCote, the results have been further validated by scientific peer review, verification of claims and records and repeat analysis and published in the UK's respected *Journal of Infection Prevention*.

The addition of BioCote, a silver based antimicrobial, to **Waterlogic** water dispensers lends added protection and peace of mind in environments that cannot risk cross contamination such as hospitals, schools and care homes.



Two similar hospital wards were tested, one with various products containing BioCote and the other without. After a trial period of normal use, the results included:

- 95.8% reduction in bacteria in the wards (over the whole ward environment) that had products with BioCote.
- 92.6% reduction in bacteria on the surfaces of BioCote protected products compared to non-protected products in the standard ward.
- 43.5% reduction in bacteria on the surface of non-protected products, which were alongside BioCote protected products found in the BioCote ward.

Waterlogic believe these findings scientifically

prove that BioCote works and by using it on critical areas of a Waterlogic machine, the entire machine can be much 'cleaner'.

Chris Garner, Waterlogic Director of Marketing noted: "BioCote protection is already a powerful selling point for Waterlogic machines. With the publication of these scientific facts regarding the effectiveness of the product, the ammunition to our sales pitch grows even stronger. We foresee this as being invaluable in approaching the healthcare industry, a sector which we are now even more capable of supplying with the launch of the Waterlogic 4, which is ideally suited for such environments." ■

Ebac's fight against bacteria

Minimising the risk of the spread of bacteria is top of **Ebac's** agenda when ensuring that their coolers can be used in all environments – including 'high risk' locations.



"If a cooler is used by a sick patient in a hospital it could end up contaminating every other person who uses that cooler with the same illness if it does not have effective technology to prevent the spread of bacteria," commented Ebac Technical Director Phillip Walton (above). "To this end Ebac have introduced a number of features designed to reduce the spread of bacteria."

One of Ebac's most recent examples is its FMax POU which features technological enhancements to minimise the spread of bacteria, including:

100% sanitisation system – all water contact parts are replaced by ejecting the old filters and inserting the new ones which means 100% sanitisation occurs every time. The coolers do not have the bacterial vulnerability that might come from a maintenance engineer who is in a hurry or poorly trained and misses a small area of the cooler when cleaning with chemicals and fluids.

'Direct Dispense' system – the FMax POU does not hold a large quantity of water which is vulnerable to bacteria growth. Instead it holds the water which still contains chlorine – which dramatically reduces the risk of contamination – and then removes the chlorine using a filter just before water is dispensed.

Duplex dispense nozzle – the actual point of dispense is protected by an outer 'shield', which ensures that a users fingers cannot come into contact with, and contaminate, the water supply. Your fingertip alone has around 32 million bacteria on it and if it came into contact with the water, the bacteria would travel up the flow of water into the reservoir where it would contaminate and multiply further.

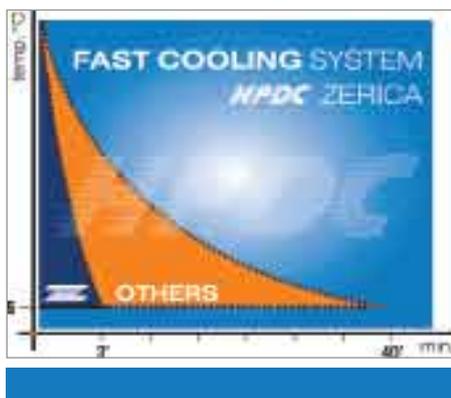
Anti-bacterial dispense handles – these are made from stainless steel which has natural anti-bacterial properties; this inhibits bacteria growth and reduces the risk of contamination.



Drip tray evaporation – most coolers have a drip tray underneath to catch all the water spills. But if rarely emptied, they become a breeding ground for bacteria. But Ebac's drip tray transports water down to a small reservoir on the compressor which then evaporates harmlessly into the atmosphere. ■

Zerica copper chilling system fights bacteria

All of Italian manufacturer **Zerica's** products are manufactured with the maximum hygiene standards in mind. Components are selected and certified for use with food and the company uses stainless steel (AISI 304 and AISI 340) for external chases and internal tubes.



Its Refresh P and Refresh Pensile water fountains are made from stainless steel. The Refresh Pensile is designed to be installed on the wall and is suited to schools,

community centres and places where customised height coolers are needed as well as allowing access for floor cleaning.

The Refresh P features Zerica's own refrigeration technology – High Performance Direct Chill (HPDC) which allows chilling of water in three minutes rather than up to 20-50 minutes

with traditional systems. HPDC is the only system today manufactured with copper, a metal scientifically proven to inhibit bacterial proliferation, such as Legionella and other pathogens, at the surface.

For high risk areas, the most suitable POU machine is the Premium 240. It includes the aforementioned HPDC technology, along with optional filtration systems including reverse osmosis and a UV steriliser. ■

Cosmetal tackles the risk

In high risk environments, hygiene is a top priority. This can be guaranteed not only through effective water filtration, removing most contaminants, but also through special materials able to restrict the reproduction of micro organisms, both inside and outside cooler surfaces.



The Niagara (left) and River range (right) from Italian manufacturer **Cosmetal** are entirely manufactured in stainless steel. There are over 150 grades of stainless steel to suit the environment to which the material will be subjected in its lifetime.

Stainless steel's robustness, resistance to corrosion and staining and low maintenance make it highly suited to a host of critical environments such as professional kitchens, schools and hospitals.

The company states its Niagara is the most effective, hygienic and economical solution for water supply in high risk areas. The cooler, available in floor standing, under counter and top counter models,

can dispense up to 180 litres of cold or sparkling water per hour. The stainless steel version has been restyled to include a smaller footprint and new look.

The Niagara range will be further enhanced in 2009, introducing a double coil to increase performance, and a self diagnostic system to monitor the functionality of the cooler in real time.

The River water fountain is also available in stainless steel. The cooler attaches directly to the mains water supply to provide consistently high quality drinking water over prolonged periods, with only minimal maintenance. The reliability of the River makes it ideal for use in factories, workshops, public spaces, train stations, naval ports and airports.

Cosmetal recently introduced a new model with front opening: a removable panel which can easily be unlocked



and opened by qualified operators, facilitating maintenance and replacing filters. ■

Price per cup from 0.04 €

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