

Safe handling of drinking water is top priority

In the summer of 2002, at a golf course in Phoenix, 85 golfers became ill and later tested positive for the flu-like Norwalk virus, including a 15-year-old boy who died from asphyxia due to vomiting caused by the virus. Contaminated water jugs on the course were determined to be the cause of the illness.

An investigation by the Maricopa County environmental health department found that at the time, 65 percent of golf courses in the county were not handling drinking water correctly. The county responded by implementing requirements for the safe handling of drinking water at facilities that hold permits from the county health department. Golf courses must now thoroughly sanitize water containers and dispensers, provide bottled water, or install permanent ice and water dispensers on the course.

Maricopa County has shared its findings and requirements with other agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration and other county and state health departments. As the golf season gets back into swing in many part of the country, now is a good time to examine how your facility handles drinking water dispensers and to take action to minimize the transmission of communicable diseases. You should also check with your county or state health department for any requirements specific to your area.

The following information was excerpted from the Maricopa County requirements for facilities that use drinking water dispensers. For a complete set of requirements, please [send an e-mail](#) or call the [government relations department](#) at (800) 472-7878, ext. 610.

Water and ice

Water and ice must be from a public water distribution system or an approved water supply that is tested to ensure conformity with applicable regulations. The dispensers shall be cleaned and sanitized at least once every 24 hours. Containers shall not be stored on the floor at any time. Cleaning and sanitizing the dispenser nozzle prior to filling containers is required.

Filling of dispensers

The dispenser shall be filled in an area free of environmental contaminants and should not be placed on the floor while filling.

The water hose used to fill the dispenser must be food grade (garden hoses are not approved) and not stored on the ground.

Hoses shall be used exclusively for drinking water dispenser filling and not to fill other equipment or tanks or used to clean other things.

Plumbing code must be met to protect the water supply. Cross connections are not allowed, and backflow devices are required.

Ice must be dispensed with an ice scoop (without coming in direct human contact). It is recommended that employees wear disposable gloves to prevent direct hand contact with ice.

Location of dispensers

The dispenser shall be placed at a minimum of three feet off the ground, locating it so it will not be subject to other sources of contamination such as sprinkler water or misting systems. If the course uses effluent water for irrigation, the dispensers must be taken in each night.

Dispensers must be placed in a tamper-proof setting to eliminate access to the ice or contents of the dispenser by removing the top cover. Single service cups must be provided and protected at the dispenser.

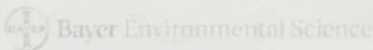
Personal hygiene

Employees must properly wash their hands prior to filling containers. A separate hand sink for employees to wash their hands shall be in the same area where containers are filled and the ice is added to the containers. Do not allow any sick person to fill or handle water containers.

Carrie Riordan is GCSAA's director of government relations.



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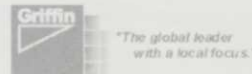
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