



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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From Nigel Paul, Director of Corporate Services Date August 2009

To All Heads of Colleges and Support Groups, Heads of Schools and equivalent

cc Administrators

Drinking Water Provision in University Buildings

Action: Please note the new Drinking Water Policy and the requirement to arrange removal of any freestanding bottled water coolers before the new semester.

As colleagues are no doubt aware, it has become increasingly apparent that the provision of bottled water and free standing water coolers, is being shown to be environmentally unfriendly, and many organisations have started to withdraw such facilities where possible.

It is also costly. It is estimated that a review of drinking water provision will save the University approximately £80,000 a year and reduce personal risk of manual handling injury or ill-health from microbiological contamination as reported in a recent Consumer Focus Scotland study.

Following discussions at several committees¹ on this issue, and subsequent approval by Central Management Group, a Drinking Water Policy was formally adopted by the University at its Court meeting on 25th May 2009. This is appended below.

The objective of the policy is to clarify the position regarding supplies of drinking water to University buildings and to eliminate freestanding bottled water coolers altogether.

During 1997-2003, Estates & Buildings upgraded all cold water storage facilities across the estate, and over the last three months, water testing has been undertaken by an independent water quality consultant, specifically to establish that water from all drinking water points is potable and meets statutory requirements for drinking water.

If you wish to discuss any water supply issues, please call Estates & Buildings Works Division (650 2494) to speak to the Premises Team serving your site. If you have any problem with suppliers concerning removal of free-standing coolers from your building then please contact Evelyn Bain, Procurement Manager (650 2506).

¹ Sustainability Issues & Fairtrade Task Group, Sustainability & Environmental Advisory Group, Estates Advisory Group

Plumbed-in water coolers

Should a Head of School / Administration Unit consider that there are exceptional circumstances which mean they absolutely require a supply of chilled water then a plumbed-in water dispenser may be requested.

Installation of such dispensers will be undertaken only after consultation with Estates and Buildings Works Division who will identify the best location, agree an appropriate model and arrange to provide water and power connections if they are not readily available.

Applications must be made to the Depute Director, E&B Works Division. Costs of the purchase, installation and maintenance of such plumbed-in dispensers must be met by the individual School / Administration Unit.

Appeals regarding whether there are exceptional circumstances that apply to the installation of a plumbed in water cooler will be decided by Vice-Principal for Planning and Resources and Director of Estates and Buildings and their decision is final.

Existing plumbed-in water coolers may be retained so long as a maintenance contract for these is established and continued, to provide for six-monthly hygiene cleans and replacement of filters etc. as required.

Please note that this document and related poster, policy and guidance note will be placed on the Estates & Buildings website.

Thank you.

Nigel Paul,

Director Corporate Services

Annex 1

Drinking Water Policy 2009

1. **Free-standing Bottled Water Coolers should not be located on University premises.** Existing units should be removed.
2. **Staff should draw off water for drinking from identified Drinking Water Taps.** If chilled water is required refillable bottles of tap water should be placed in a fridge to cool.
3. **Drinking water points should be provided in convenient locations and clearly identified.**
4. **Caterers serving University premises should no longer provide bought-in bottled water.** Drinking water for meetings and events should be provided in jugs or in bottles filled from the tap. These may be cooled in a fridge beforehand if the weather is very hot.
5. **Only in exceptional circumstances should Plumbed-in Water Coolers be installed.** Only approved units must be installed and under supervision of Estates & Buildings with installation and running cost paid by requesting School or admin unit.
6. **A rolling programme of testing of potability of water from drinking water taps to be undertaken.**

Adopted by the University Court on 25th May 2009

The University has adopted a more sustainable and economic policy on drinking water and is dispensing with freestanding bottled water coolers and bottled water.

- Staff and students should draw off water for drinking from normal cold water taps.
- All cold water supplies are to drinking water standard
- All cold water supplies comply with UK Water Bye-Laws
- Drinking water is available in a convenient location (the aim is that no one has to walk more than three minutes).

There are some taps that should NOT be used for drinking – because of the risk of contamination in a particular location. These are in Laboratories, Workshops or Sanitary Facilities.

Further information is on the Estates and Buildings web site.

Estates and Buildings

August 2009

Drinking Water Guidance Note

This note supplements the Drinking Water Policy adopted by Court in 25th May 2009 and issued to all Schools and admin units in August 2009. It should be read in conjunction with the Drinking Water posters issued at that time. All these are available on Estates and Buildings website.

Background

The University provides an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water to employees² by making sure that:

- All pipe fed water supplies are to drinking water standard
- All pipe fed water supplies are either connected to a water main, or to a storage cistern that complies with the requirements of the UK Water Bye-Laws
- There is a supply of wholesome drinking water available in a convenient location (we aim to provide a drinking water supply within three minutes' walk of each workplace).

During 1997-2003 Estates & Buildings upgraded all mains water storage facilities across the estate. Regular tests of the water supplies for potability are now carried out, using an independent analytical company. The results of these tests can be accessed on a building basis at the Estates and Buildings website.

Whilst the supply of water at all pipe fed outlets is to drinking water standard there are some supply points that should not be used for drinking purposes. This is because of the risk of contamination of the tap due to activities carried out in a particular location.

Do not drink from taps located in Laboratories, Workshops or Sanitary Facilities.

² The relevant legislative obligations are the general duties under the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974 and the specific duty under Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992

Bottled water coolers

There are adverse health, safety, environmental and financial issues allied to the use of freestanding bottled water coolers:

- The bottles are heavy when full and require lifting and manipulating in order to fit to the dispensers – this presents an avoidable and unacceptable risk of manual handling injury
- There are health issues related to bacteria³ incubating in the air space created as the water level reduces and potentially contaminated air enters the void. Bacteria can also incubate in the bottles of water if not stored properly or if the dispenser is not sited properly and is subject to low usage
- There is an avoidable environmental impact, both locally and nationally, because of the need for regular deliveries adding to the University's carbon footprint
- The recurring requirement for provision of bottled water for dispensers represents a considerable and avoidable expense across the University.

As the University supplies wholesome drinking water within all of its buildings **the use of freestanding bottled water dispensers is not permitted.**

Plumbed-in water coolers

Should a Head of School / admin unit consider that there are exceptional circumstances which mean they absolutely require a supply of chilled water then a plumbed-in water dispenser may be requested. These dispensers present a lower degree of health, safety, or environmental risk as bottled dispensers:

- there is no manual handling element in providing an ongoing water supply
- biological hazards² are slightly reduced as the potential risk from poor storage and siting of filled bottles is eliminated as is the potential for bacterial incubation due to contaminated air being introduced to the air space within bottles – however they must be properly maintained and cleaned internally twice a year
- the environmental impact is reduced as there is no transport / delivery element in providing an ongoing water supply
- the financial element is reduced as the cost of purchase / lease of the dispenser, cleaning and supply of power to it, is less than ongoing cost of supply of bottled water.

Costs of purchase / lease, installation and maintenance of such plumbed-in dispensers must be met by individual School / admin unit. Installation of such dispensers must be undertaken only after consultation with Estates and Buildings Works Division who will survey to identify the best location, agree appropriate model and arrange to provide water and power connections if they are not readily available. Applications must be made to the Depute Director, Estates and Buildings, Works Division.

³ **“Fountain Failures: Are poorly managed water coolers risking the health of consumers in Scotland?”** Consumer Focus Scotland report published March 2009 is at <http://tiny.cc/coolers> for those interested. The watchdog organisation called for a review of the law covering water coolers after 26% of those tested by environmental health officers across Edinburgh, Lothians & Borders failed to meet hygiene standards.

Water samples were taken in schools, care homes and leisure centres as well as workplaces. While all passed chemical analysis, 9 out of 52 samples from plumbed-in coolers and 14 out of 35 from bottle supplied coolers, failed because of bacterial contamination. www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk

Appeals regarding whether there are exceptional circumstances that apply to the installation of a plumbed in water cooler will be decided by Vice-Principal for Planning and Resources and Director of Estates and Buildings and their decision is final.

Existing plumbed-in water coolers may be retained only if properly maintained under contract with hygiene cleaning and change of filters as required every six months.

Guidance from the Health & Safety Department

Guidance on water coolers is at: www.safety.ed.ac.uk/resources/General/Water_Coolers.shtm. This recognises that drinking water can be an emotive subject and that individual taste plays a significant part in one's perception of whether water is of drinking quality.

Bottled water at meetings / events

The provision of bottled water at meetings / events represents an avoidable environmental and financial impact; consequently, the provision of such water at meetings is prohibited. Water should be provided in jugs filled from a tap supply. Should chilled water be required it is recommended that such water is provided by placing jugs or refillable bottles of tap water in a fridge to cool prior to the meeting / event.

Drinking Water Provision in University Buildings

Estates and Buildings, August 2009