

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Severe Legionnaires' Infections Lead Guests to Sue Secret Harbour Resort

One plaintiff claims neurological damage and job loss after contracting Legionnaires' disease at Secret Harbour Resort, while another describes critical illness and intensive care hospitalization, all allegedly stemming from contaminated water sources.

Health / **Published On May 03, 2025 07:32 AM /**

Janeka Simon **May 03, 2025**



Secret Harbour Beach Resort in St. Thomas, USVI.

Two people who say they contracted Legionnaires disease from the hot tub at Secret Harbour Beach Resort on St. Thomas are now suing the hotel.

According to the civil complaints, filed on April 22, Kirsten Watkins and James Ann Chester, along with several other guests in their party, stayed at the resort from June 8 - 11, 2023. Among the amenities Ms. Watkins and Ms. Chester used was the hot tub.

“Upon information and belief, the Legionella bacteria that were present in the hot tub were inhaled and ingested” by the users of the hot tub, the lawsuit states.

Days after she returned to her home in Wisconsin, Ms. Watkins says that she began to experience symptoms associated with Legionnaires disease – headaches, body aches, nausea, fatigue and diarrhea. Ms. Chester’s lawsuit alleges a similar experience, with symptoms of Legionnaires disease cropping up on June 13, 2023.

For Ms. Watkins, an initial trip to her primary care physician yielded a prescription for antibiotics and a recommendation to hydrate. Despite the medical attention, her health deteriorated as the weeks went on, she claims. Her symptoms, said the lawsuit, worsened to include numbness and weakness along the right side of her body, along with pain in her lower body and muscle spasms in her back. “Due to her exposure to the Legionella bacteria, her limbs just stopped working. Watkins...felt like she was never going to walk again,” the lawsuit claims.

Meanwhile, Ms. Chester was taken to the emergency room approximately three days after her first symptoms appeared. She remained in hospital for almost a week, with a diagnosis of Legionella pneumonia. “While at the hospital lifesaving measures were performed to protect her organs and save her life as Chester was deathly ill for 3 days,” her complaint alleges. Following her hospital stay, she reportedly spent another week in an in-patient rehabilitation center for treatment.

While Ms. Chester’s illness seemed to resolve itself after that, Ms. Watkins would need to seek medical attention several times in July 2023, until she was finally admitted to hospital in early August. The Legionella bacteria, doctors found, had made its way to her spinal cord and brain, leading to neurological complications. “As a result of the legionella bacteria, Watkins’ central nervous system continues to experience communication problems between her brain and the rest of her body,” her lawsuit alleges.

Ms. Watkins, having exhausted her statutory medical leave, was terminated from her job. Her continuing symptoms, which according to the lawsuit include debilitating pain, render her unable to seek new employment, and require her to receive “lifetime medication and neurological care to minimize the permanent damage and deterioration of the nerve fibers.”

All the other guests in the party contracted Legionnaires’ disease except one, the lawsuit says. The only person spared was the one who reportedly did not use the hotel’s hot tub.

Secret Harbor is accused of failing to adequately maintain its premises, failing to properly inspect for threats including the presence of Legionella in their water systems, and failing to treat its systems with the appropriate chemicals to suppress bacterial contamination. As a result, the lawsuits ask for compensation for the injuries suffered by the two women.

As of press time, Secret Harbor Beach Resort has not yet filed its response to the civil complaints.

Legionella bacteria colonizing water sources and systems have been an issue in the territory since at least 2022, when a [public notice was issued](#) alerting the public to the matter. After two people became ill with Legionnaires disease, with one needing hospitalization, specialists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were [dispatched to the territory](#) to assist local Department of Health officials with testing.

The problem reared its head again earlier this year, with a St. Croix hotel [ordered to shut down in January](#) after two guests were sickened by a Legionella infection. One of the two required treatment in the Intensive Care Unit, while an additional three people were being monitored for suspected infection. The resort was allowed to resume operations [several days later](#).