



Section Heading Required

MAINS FED (POINT OF USE) WATERCOOLERS – A SIGNIFICANT AID TO HYDRATION

To learn more about POU coolers, for copies of EPDWA Guidelines, or to check if a supplier is a member contact:

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[European Point of Use Drinking Water Association \(EPDWA\)](http://www.epdwa.org)

The importance of good hydration is now indisputable and well documented. What is not so well understood is that hydration in the elderly and sick is crucial for health and well being. A recent study carried out for Water UK showed that many elderly people were severely dehydrated and that the incidence and impact of ailments of the elderly such as urinary tract infections, circulatory problems, strokes, falls and dementia could be alleviated by good hydration. Yet the provision of good chilled drinking water in care homes, hospitals and related establishments is patchy to say the least. Schools until recently were in a similar state but recent legislative changes and initiatives on healthy eating and drinking mean that schools now have to provide a supply of chilled drinking water. So why not GP practices, hospitals and care homes?

PROVISION OF WATER

The mains water supply in the UK is one of the safest in the world. The high standards of the Drinking Water Inspectorate see to that. Yet many people are reluctant to drink tap water. This can be put down to perceived health issues but most of all to taste. To get more people to drink water it is important to make it more attractive. As a result watercooler culture has grown in the workplace in the UK.

Key factors in the reluctance of health establishments and care homes to use bottled water mostly cost related.

POINT OF USE COOLERS

The role of a pou cooler and its filter is to render tap water more attractive by chilling it and removing the unpleasant tasting disinfectant residues that tap water must carry to protect it on its passage through the mains system. The advantages of POU coolers are as follows.

- Mains water is good quality. In blind tastings of cooled and filtered tap water many consumers noticed little difference in taste from bottled water
- Mains fed coolers are significantly cheaper than bottled costing pence rather than pounds for a 19-litre quantity. This difference becomes progressively greater in proportion as water usage grows
- Mains water is on tap. No lorries to transport bottled water. No storage issues (of full and empty bottles), lifting of heavy weights, or administering the buying and collection process
- The coolers and their supplies are closed systems sealed against airborne contamination. Important in Health Establishments.

FEED SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION. THE NEED FOR SURVEYS AND STANDARDS

The keys to ensuring good water quality are the way in which the cooler is installed and the supply chosen for it. In particular tanked supplies are to be avoided except where the system is dosed and maintained as a dedicated drinking supply. A good supplier will carry out a detailed survey of your premises in order to choose the best supply and minimise the amount of micro-bore pipework used. In addition routing of pipework must avoid warm areas and heating pipes and radiators.

FILTERS

Only the best quality filters of certificated performance should be used. These must be changed at least every 6 months. If, sometimes happens, there are no taste issues in the feed supply a filter may not be needed.

SANITISATION

Coolers will pick up traces of contamination from the user and may develop internal

biofilms with prolonged use. In order to maintain water quality regular effective sanitisation is called for. This must be done by hygiene trained staff and should be carried out at least every six months.

EUROPEAN POINT OF USE DRINKING WATER ASSOCIATION.

It's easy to ensure that your installation and service conforms. Make sure that you use an Accredited Member of EPDWA. EPDWA was formed by leading POU cooler companies in 2001 to bring regulation and standards to the industry. Its success shows in its membership (130 and rising fast) and in that the POU industry is growing much faster than bottled coolers. EPDWA has a Technical Helpline and employs a consultant microbiologist to develop standards. It works very closely with Water UK and contributes to initiatives on promoting healthy eating and drinking. EPDWA audits its member's operations and installation standards yearly. It runs compulsory detailed hygiene and installation and sanitisation course. The former includes basic water microbiology.

EPDWA HAS A DETAILED CODE OF PRACTICE AND AUDIT STANDARDS.

Schools and Hospitals Guidelines

Recognising the special circumstances of health care units and schools the EPDWA has prepared Guidelines for the use of POU coolers in schools and hospitals specifying where and to whom coolers may be provided.

For more on the provision of coolers for the elderly go to the following website run by our colleagues at Water UK:- www.water.org.uk/home/water-for-health and click on the Older People icon. ■

