

POLLUTED



Decontamination squad: Workers enter the danger zone at Carlisle police station. Levels of bacteria are 100 times higher than normal

■ Bacteria
levels are
so high in
flood-hit
city police
station that
this is the
only way in

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Police station infected by dangerous flood bacteria



Experts find contamination levels are 100 times the norm

DANGEROUS bacteria – 100 times the normal level – has been found in Carlisle police station following the floods.

High levels of effluent materials were discovered in samples taken from the Rickergate base last week and the public health body notified amid concerns over health risks.

Officials wearing full protective gear and breathing apparatus are now the only ones allowed inside the station as it is stripped bare. All of the furniture and porous materials – including wood panelling and noticeboards – will have to be completely destroyed.

A force spokesman described the bacteria levels – including e-coli – as “very significant”. Concern is now mounting among residents in

NEWS & STAR EXCLUSIVE

BY VICTORIA BREMAN

flood-hit properties, worried that they may have similarly high levels of bacteria.

Andy Christopherson, of Cumbria Police, project manager for the recovery and reinstatement of the station, said: “We have a high level of contamination. I’ve been told that, in normal river water, the level is around one or two. Ours is 100 plus.

“If it gets into cuts it could cause infections and, because of the damp and the time elapsed, there are breathing issues due to spores. Anyone who suffers from asthma is particularly at risk. If the bacteria is ingested, it could cause severe sickness.”

Decontamination chambers have been set up in the

police yard as specialist teams work to recover documents and property.

Faecal bacteria has contaminated computer equipment and furniture, which will have to be destroyed after being removed and sprayed with anti-viral detergents.

Mr Christopherson said all of the paperwork would be removed in crates and taken to Kent where it would be decontaminated. Around 20 workers from Document SOS – a specialist firm who have worked for the Ministry of Defence – will be on site until Wednesday removing property. A further 12 from removal specialists Aztech will work stripping down wood panelling and noticeboards, and pulling off plaster, reducing the station to an empty shell.

The high contamination

levels came to light on Friday when the results of samples taken by contractors working for Capita came through.

“I have spoken to Dr Nigel Calvert [North Cumbria’s health protection consultant] who agreed with the way we are dealing with this,” Mr Christopherson said. “It will take around 26 weeks to get everything out and stripped down then we will have to sanitise the building.”

Residents in homes close to the station, which were also deluged by the flood-water, are worried they could be at risk from infection.

A mother from Corporation Road said they should have been made aware of the high levels of bacteria once the test results were passed to the health authority.

“It’s outrageous,” she said. It is not yet known whether

council officials will move back into the nearby Civic Centre next week, as originally planned. Carlisle magistrates court had also hoped to open in the coming weeks but may also be affected by the high bacteria levels.

Dr Nigel Calvert was unavailable for comment this morning. In the immediate aftermath of the floods the health authority issued warnings to residents that flood water could be contaminated and advised people to use protective clothing while clearing up.

Dr Tony Horne, of Carlisle’s London Road practice, said: “We are seeing a certain number of cases of diarrhoea and vomiting but it is very difficult to say if this is as a result of the floods or what we would normally see at this time of year.



Well protected: One of the experts at work