

Swimming Pools

The On/Off, Hot/Cold, Love/Hate Relationship

Heliophilia – desire to stay in the sun; love of sunlight.

If you've never owned a swimming pool, and maybe even if you do own a pool, the word "pool" likely conjures mixed emotions.

Sipping ice cream floats while floating, lounging lazily and watching the puppy-dog clouds drifting overhead, lollygagging in the shallows, chatting with friends and family on a lazy summer afternoon, or even skinny-dipping at midnight under the stars (and preferably not under the neighbor's window).



Or...futzing around with dangerous, flesh-eating chemicals, picking decomposed frog parts from skimmers, incessant brushing and cleaning, and perhaps most enthralling, playing free baby-sitter to the neighborhood kids. All 97 of them. While screaming, "Hey, I don't *swim* in your toilet, can you please stop *peeing* in my pool?"

When you've reached *that* nadir, a dip in the pool may well be your last hope for relief – but only if you're swimming in someone *else's* pool.

Thankfully, a pool is a bit like life – most of our time is spent somewhere in the middle of the extremes. Yes, you will enjoy your pool. But no, you're not going to just enjoy lollygag time if you want your pool to remain refreshing and inviting.

A pool is just like any other property investment. Maintain + Enjoy vs. Neglect + Regret.

A well-maintained pool can deliver a lifetime of joy and pleasant memories (well, not a *lifetime*, but pretty darn near a *half a lifetime*). A poorly maintained pool can deliver what probably would feel like a half a lifetime of sadness and bitter tears because of the transformation of what once was sparkling blue water into a huge and costly water-filled money pit.

In this month's edition, we discuss pool maintenance and pool safety, two critical aspects of pool ownership.

Why It Matters: There Are How Many Pools?!

Pools is a big market (that *can't* be proper English).

According to the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals (APSP), there were over 8.5 million pools in 2013, with 350,000 having come on line in the prior year. There were over 5.8 million hot tubs.

Think you're good at Family Feud? Then you can probably guess where most of the nation's pools hang out together. You instantly thought of "Hot States." Survey says? Yes, you're smart. California, Florida, Texas, Arizona comprise the top four states for swimming pools, representing about 60% of the total installed 5.1 million in-ground swimming pools in the US.

OK, wise one! Bet you can't guess the next six states which round out the top 10: New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, and the Old Dominion State (look it up!), otherwise known as the "Non-Hot States."

The point is that pools are *everywhere* – 14+ million pools and hot tubs.

The Triple Lindy of Maintenance: Chemicals, Cleaning and Pump

Despite what you may have been led to believe, pool maintenance really isn't a drag. It just requires commitment. Come now, do you have commitment? Pool maintenance doesn't need to be a full-time job, and once you have the pool water balanced properly after the season opening, maintenance generally requires less than an hour per week.

When boiled down to its basics, the appeal of a pool is pretty simple – it's got water in it! Accordingly, the most important part of pool maintenance is keeping the *water* clean and safe.



- **Chemicals** – Most of us have experienced the eye-stinging consequences of poorly maintained pool water; the common misperception is that "too much chlorine" causes the stinging red eye. Not true – the *real* cause of red eye is improper pH, a measure of the water's balance of acids and alkalis. If the water is too acidic, it will not only burn your eyes, it will corrode metal equipment; if the water is

too alkali-ly, it will be murky and allow algae to form. Thankfully, chemical maintenance is an established science, not an art. After the season's grand opening, maintenance generally requires a simple pH strip test every week and the addition of any number of ready-made, packaged chemicals (chlorine, muriatic acid) to adjust the pH.

- **Skimmer/Vacuum** – Most in-ground pools have systems to remove everyday debris (dirt, insects, tree debris, etc.), that gets into the pool water. The skimmer functions as a surface level cleaner; the vacuum removes non-floating debris at the bottom of the pool. Normal maintenance involves disposing of debris from the skimmer basket and vacuuming the bottom of the pool. Many pools are equipped with automatic vacuums that run on timer systems, and some pools have built-in jet systems which rotate in sequence and “push” debris to the main drain at the bottom of the pool.
- **Pool Pump and Filter** – The pool pump functions to circulate the water in the pool and minimize algae. The pump provides the circulation necessary for the operation of the skimmer and vacuum; a well-maintained pump should last at least 10 years. Filters collect dirt and debris; filters should be cleaned monthly.



The key to maintenance is consistency – stick to a schedule and pay careful attention to water chemistry. Consistent and regular upkeep goes a long way towards keeping your pool in tip-top shape.

And Now For Something Completely Serious: Safety

We hate be regarded as buzzkills, but when we talk pools, we also have to talk safety.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) provide the startling statistics: "From 2005-2009, there were an average of 3,533 fatal unintentional drownings (non-boating related) annually in the US – about 10 deaths per day. Only about one in five people who die from drowning are children 14 and younger. For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for non-fatal submersion injuries."



Pools can be fun but only if they're safe. It's hard to imagine being too overzealous with regards to pool safety precautions, and we generally focus on two important safety considerations: supervision and access restrictions.

Supervision is one of the most effective ways to prevent drowning among children and the rule is simple – *never* leave a child or children alone near or in a pool. Don't trust the “safety in numbers” myth – children can't be relied upon to look after each other.

Safety shouldn't stop with the kids – an adult should exercise extreme caution if she risks swimming alone for exercise or pleasure. A good rule of thumb is to never swim alone.

Last but not least, we hope it's obvious that swimming and pools and alcohol don't mix well – or at all. Better to be safe than sorry – stay away from the spirits.

Restricted access is another effective method to prevent drowning. The CDC recommends installing a four-sided fence which separates the pool area from the rest of the property; fences should be a minimum of four feet high and should employ self-closing and self-latching mechanisms. Other helpful measures include installing door locks which prevent a child from accessing the pool by herself, or alarms which activate if someone enters the pool area.

What We Review: Pool Inspection Challenges

We've conducted tens of thousands of pool inspections across the fruited plains and our data indicates that there are three main categories of pool-related inspection issues: structural, safety, and equipment.

Structural Problems

Pool owners dread to hear the phrase “structural problems” when they're reviewing inspection results and recommended mitigation. But even if a pool is well maintained, surface cracks or deterioration may appear as a pool begins to age; cracks indicate that the pool could be leaking or in danger of developing a leak and further investigation is required.

We also inspect the pool deck for evidence of cracking, heaving, or sloping because this type of damage can not only cause people to trip and fall, but problems with the pool deck could be caused by settlement problems in the area directly surrounding the pool, which may also reveal a leak in the pool or piping.



Safety Problems

We examine very carefully all issues related to safety, focusing specifically on potential safety breaches. Although code generally requires fencing, we occasionally inspect properties in which the pool isn't properly fenced and even more frequently, cases in which the gate and/or latch don't work properly. At the point of being repetitive, fencing must be at least four feet high with properly functioning self-closing and/or self-latching mechanisms.

Equipment Problems

The pool pump is the heart of a pool's system and, therefore, must be checked regularly to ensure that it is functioning properly – pump problems are evident by poor water circulation or floating flotsam and

jetsam. Main defects in pool pumps include leaking and corrosion, as well as the chance that the pump's lines may contain air.

The pool filter must be checked regularly (monthly); if the filter captures too much debris and the system's pressure creeps up without mitigation, the pump's life could be shortened because of the extra work required to circulate the water through dirty filters. The pump, skimmer/vacuum, and filter must all remain in good working condition if you want your pool to stay "happy and healthy."

[And Now Back To Summertime Fun!](#)

Owning and maintaining a pool can be a mixed bag, but it's hard to argue with 14+ million homeowners – pools are definitely worth whatever trouble they're perceived to cause.

The happiest pool owners understand that the keys to happy pool ownership are regular maintenance and proper safety measures.

Pool chemicals OK? Check.

Pool safety OK? Check.

Pool equipment OK? Check

Then go ahead, put on your "Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polkadot Bikini," embrace the life of a heliopheliac, and jump on in!

[If you have any questions about pools, spas or any inspection service, US Inspect is pleased and available to guide and assist you.](#)

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