

Are you in over your head?

By Carlene Brown

Summertime has begun and it's prime time for ample amounts of sunblock and swimming, no matter if it's in a swimming pool or at the beach. As you prepare for the swimming season, make sure you are keeping your head above water. Many of our members have swimming pools and outdoor open water swim. Did you know that there are important differences between pool swimming and beach swimming? Each comes with its own set of risks that need to be managed.

Entrapment injuries in swimming pools steadily increased through the latter part of the last century, until they obtained national attention when the granddaughter of former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker drowned in the family hot tub by becoming trapped by the suction of a powerful main drain. This prompted the VGB act of 2007, named after Virginia Graeme Baker.

VGB COMPLIANT DRAIN COVERS: Flat grates are out, raised anti-vortex drain covers are in. If your pool was built before 2007, your drain covers may be unsafe. Replacing with a drain cover that meets the ASME/ANSI A112.19.8 performance standard is recommended. However, of equal importance to the type of cover, is to be certain that the drain cover is firmly attached with both screws at all times. Additionally, consider keeping hot tub and spa jets off when children are in the spa.

Many swimming pools will have diving boards and various depths. Signs should be posted stating to only dive in the deep areas of the pool while under lifeguard supervision; signage should prohibit running around the pool area.

A facility should be closed and a sign posted indicating the facility has been closed until further notice whenever the following requirements are not met:

1. Appropriate levels of trained staff are unavailable for a facility, even temporarily;
2. There are any unhealthy, unsafe, or unsanitary conditions, including lack of compliance with a water quality or operational requirement; or
3. An operating permit has not been issued/renewed.

While swimming pools present unique risk management issues, Designated Beach Swimming Areas, whether at a lake or along a river, present different challenges for members to manage. The following recommendations should be considered:

1. Use floating lines to enclose designated swimming area(s). The size of the swimming area should be limited to an area which can be adequately searched for a known submerged victim within a two-minute time period.

2. Use flotation buoys to identify changes in water depths or any sudden bottom drop-offs. Secure buoys to prevent movement. Check on a regular basis to ensure buoys have not moved.
3. Post signage to indicate:
 - Swimming after dark is prohibited.
 - NO DIVING with pictorial universal symbols where diving is prohibited.
 - Water craft not allowed to enter the designated swimming area.
 - Alcoholic beverages and glass items are prohibited.

Since open water can change from calm to ferocious in a matter of minutes due to weather, it is also important to have the proper signage such as “swim at your own risk” and “no lifeguard on duty” if lifeguards are not present.

If lifeguards are used, they should receive training in open water lifesaving that is offered by the American Red Cross, United States Lifesaving Association or other nationally recognized program to include but not be limited to: lost bather/swimmer drills, search and recovery drills for turbid water, the use of mask and fin, boat rescue techniques, paddle board rescue techniques, and the use of SCUBA as necessary.

For further information, please refer to WCIA's Water Recreation Facilities guideline, PAR.07, in the Liability Resource Manual. The Liability Resource Manual is available through the Member Resources page on the WCIA website: <http://www.wciapool.org/member-resources>.

Training Resources:

WCIA supports swimming pool operations education by providing reimbursement for:

- Aquatic Facility Operator Certification (AFO)
- NSPF (National Swimming Pool Foundation) Certified Pool Operator

Reimbursement is provided upon completion of the individual program. Access to the reimbursement process is found under the Training Reimbursements tab on our website at www.wciapool.org.

WCIA Risk Management Representatives are available and eager to answer any questions on this topic and others. Keep in touch!