

Checking water conditions keeps pools clean, clear

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By Carrie Napoleon Post-Tribune correspondent (www.post-trib.com)

You don't have to live in the Sun Belt to appreciate just what a backyard swimming pool has to offer. Many Northwest Indiana residents are trying to make the most of the hot summer months with their own backyard oases. However, that hot summer sun, rain and debris can wreak havoc on water quality and turn crystal-clear waters into a murky mess of algae and debris. But with a little effort -- and without a degree in chemistry -- homeowners can keep their in-ground or above-ground pools in peak swimming condition all season.

According to experts, staying on top of the water condition in your back yard just takes a little work and the right mix of chemicals.

"The biggest problem this time of year is cloudy water and algae," said Victor Kay, owner of Aloha-2 Inc. in Valparaiso.

Aloha-2 sells Atlantic, Artesian, Wil-bar and Aqua Leader pools and Bull Frog Spas, along with chemicals and supplies for both in-ground and aboveground pools.

Conditions are perfect this time of year to generate algae growth and create cloudy water. Rain can throw off the chemical balance of the pool, and the hot sun warms the water, weakening the chlorine and promoting algae growth.

Wind can blow debris into the pool, and swimmers can bring chemicals -- such as lotion, hair-care products and makeup -- into the water on their bodies.

"People don't realize how little outside contaminants it takes to turn a pool bad," Kay said.

If people don't pay attention to the condition of their pools, the water can change from clear to cloudy in as little as a week. Frequent water testing helps pool owners stay on top of what chemicals might be needed to keep the water balanced and clear.

Kelly Cochran, who owns Better Backyards in Hobart with her husband, Jason, said keeping up with vacuuming the pool at least once or twice a week is one of the main things someone can do to keep their pool in tip-top shape.

"It keeps the debris out of the pool and keeps it from forming algae," Cochran said.

She agreed it doesn't take much for the clear water in a pool to turn to something less than savory. As owner of the business, which installs in-ground and above-ground pools and provides services such as cleaning, opening and closing, she said she has seen everything from cloudy or green pools to some with water so bad it looked like sewage.

"Once it starts to go bad, it gets really bad," she said. "The hotter it is, the worse they get."

Staying on top of the chemicals will keep the pool in good shape regardless of the weather. Today's testing methods range from kits where water is collected and tested in small vials to test strips that can read the pH and alkaline levels, among other things, after a dip in the water.

Places like Aloha-2 also offer testing. The testing is free to its customers or available for a charge to others.

Cochran advised new pool owners to test the water daily, or at the minimum every other day. She said most pool owners eventually get a feel for their water conditions and how often testing is needed.

Both business owners agreed there are no set specifications for how a pool will react, how often it should be tested or what chemicals it might need.

Different environmental factors such as pool size, the number of trees in the yard and how much direct sun the pools get can all factor into how the water will react.

"There's no magic formula," Kay said.

Easy-to-follow tips to winterize pools

It's hard to believe summer is halfway gone. Before long, it will be time to winterize that pool.

Kelly Cochran, owner of Better Backyards in Hobart, said there are a few simple steps every pool owner must take to ensure their pool weathers the winter season without problems.

"For both above- and in-ground pools, if there is an in-drain, all the water has to be out of the lines so it doesn't crack or freeze," Cochran said.

A cracked drain line can be a costly repair, especially for an in-ground pool.

Both pool varieties need winterizing chemicals, available in kits from any pool store, to keep the water clear over the winter months.

Above-ground pools need to be drained below the return and the skimmer so the units don't freeze and crack. An alternative, Cochran said, is an Aquador -- a plastic-style lid that snaps over the skimmer. With the Aquador, the pool does not have to be drained.

Both types of pools will need to have the motors drained.

"Make sure to get all the water out. There's a lot of plastic parts and you don't want any of them to freeze or crack," she said.

To ensure this happens, drain and disassemble filters. Replace components such as sand and clean all cartridges. And remove all hoses connecting the filter to the pool.

Cochran suggests keeping the swimming pool motor in the garage or shed over the winter to protect the motor from the elements.

Also, shut down all heating units. You can relight them again in the spring.

Keep an eye on your winter cover for above-ground pools, said Sharon Carey, a warranty administrator for Atlantic Pool Products Inc.

"Make sure to clear the cover after a heavy snowfall and not to install it too tightly, so that if the cover does get too heavy, it will slip into the pool instead of crushing it," she said.

Winterizing your Pool

□ Part No. 1920749
rev. 0

IMPORTANT: The attached WINTERIZING instructions supersede any other WINTERIZING instructions supplied with the pool.



Caution:
Make sure the pool is not leaking. Serious structural damage can occur if leaks go undetected through winter shut-down from ice movement.



Caution:
If rust corrosion is found, immediate corrective action must be taken. Pool structure failure could result in major property damage and bodily harm.



Caution:
Do not drain all the water from your pool for the winter, and do not remove the liner. An empty pool may collapse in the winter.

At the end of the swimming season, you must follow these directions to make your pool ready for the winter:

1. Prior to Winterizing:

Several days prior to closing your pool, test the water for the pH level, total alkalinity, calcium hardness and chlorine. The water balance is important to protect the pool from corrosion or scale build-up during winter shut-down.

2. Perform a Complete Inspection:

a. Finding Leaks

Caution: Make sure the pool is not leaking before covering. Serious structural damage can occur if leaks go undetected through winter shut-down from ice movement. Maintain a strict leak inspection during the fall, winter and spring months. To determine if the pool is leaking, mark the liner at the water level with a non-permanent marking device such as tape or a wax pencil and observe the water level in the pool for 10 to 14 days after the pool has been closed for the season.

b. Check the Liner

Make sure the top of the liner is still attached to the pool wall. **Make sure there are no leaks.** Repair any liner holes with a vinyl patch: any small punctures in the liner can be easily repaired with underwater repair kits available from your pool dealer. **Do not** remove the liner from the pool. Removal of the liner will void the existing warranty.

c. Check all Joints and Screws

Make sure all the frame joints are fitting together properly and make sure the pool wall has not shifted from the bottom rail. Ensure all screws and bolts are tight.

d. Check for Rust

Periodically inspect the metal parts for any corrosion – especially around the skimmer area. If corrosion is found, **immediate corrective action must be taken.** Wire brush any rust and add a coat of enamel primer followed by a coat of color matching anti-rust enamel paint. **Pool structure failure could result in major property damage and bodily harm.** Paint any scratches with anti-rust paint.

3. Lower the Water Level:

a. Lower the water level in your pool until it is about 6" (15 cm) below the skimmer opening. In areas where temperatures reach -30 to -40 degrees, lower the water level until it is about 18" (46 cm) deep but no more than 24" (61 cm) deep when freezing begins. **Do not** drain all the water from the pool for the winter.

b. The water level must be maintained at least 3" (76 mm) below the skimmer opening throughout the winter. Surplus water must be removed by pumping, draining or siphoning so that it doesn't enter the skimmer during the winter.

4. Skimmer Preparation:

Remove all hoses attached to the skimmer and return fittings. **Make sure all water is drained from the skimmer housing, and make sure the hole at the bottom of the skimmer is left UNPLUGGED. The opening at the bottom of the skimmer must be kept open so that any accumulated water can drain immediately. Do not** let water freeze in the skimmer. Leave the skimmer **attached** to the pool wall and ensure that the skimmer lid is installed.

5. Filter Preparation:

Disconnect the hoses from the filter. Follow the winterizing instructions in your filter manual.



Caution:
Make sure no weight is on the cover.

Remove any excess snow, rain water and leaf accumulation from the top of the cover.

6. Winter Cover Preparation:

- a. Vacuum any leaves and debris from the pool sides and bottom.
- b. Remove all accessories from the pool, including the ladder – leave the skimmer attached. **Do not drain the pool or remove the liner.**
- c. Tie down the cover properly to assure the cover does not blow off or fall in the pool. **Do not attach the pool cover** to top rails, verticals, connectors or any part of the skimmer. Use cover clips to secure the cover (if applicable) – do not hang bottles or their weight will tear the cover. If the cable attaching the cover to the pool is too tight and pulling up on the pool ledges, or creating excessive weight on the pool, release the cable at once to prevent damage to the pool.
- d. **Do not** let too much snow accumulate on the top rails, skimmer or cover - remove any excess snow, rain water and leaf accumulation from the top of the cover due to excess weight that can damage the pool walls. Check regularly after rain or snow fall and loosen the cover if necessary.
- e. **Do not** use abrasive materials such as concrete blocks, bricks, or boards to hold a cover down. Should ice cut your pool liner causing the pool to empty, **make sure no weight is on the cover.**
- f. When re-opening the pool in the spring, do not remove the cover from the pool without first pumping all the water off the cover.
- g. Follow the manufacturers instructions, supplied with the pool cover.

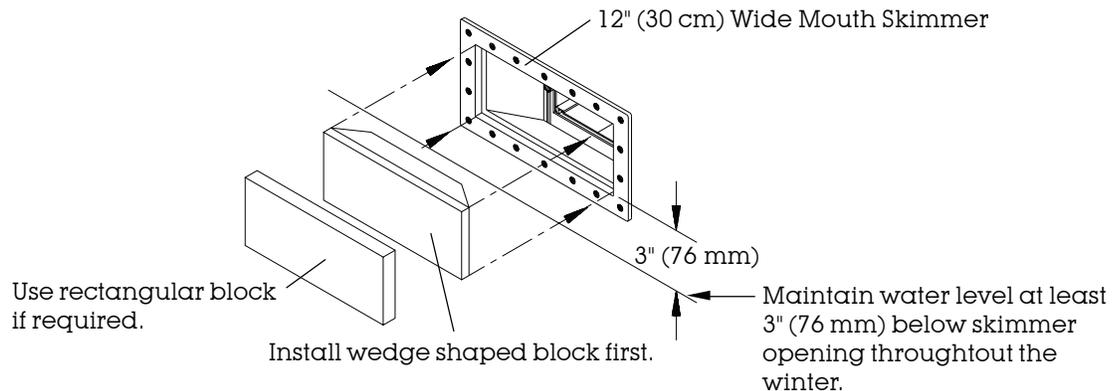
7. Pool Winterizing Kit:

Pools with 12" skimmers:

The WINTERIZING KIT (Part No. 1370143) must be installed. If it has not been supplied with the pool it can be purchased from your local pool dealer. Unless the winterizing kit has been installed in accordance with the instructions supplied below any claims, in warranty or otherwise may not be accepted.



Remember:
Failure to follow the winterizing procedures, in accordance with these instructions, may void the pool warranty.



Installation:

"PAWS" Skimmer:

- 1. Force the wedge shaped block into the skimmer opening until it sits flush with the face flange.

Other Skimmers:

- 1. Place the wedge shaped block into the skimmer throat.
- 2. Force the rectangular shaped block into the skimmer opening until it sits flush with the face flange.

Note:

On some skimmers, it may be necessary to trim the foam to make a friction fit and/or use a wooden wedge to keep it in place during the winter.

For further directions, please refer to the winterizing instructions accompanying your pool cover. Consult the dealer in your region for procedures if you have a main drain, lights or special equipment. **Failure to follow these instructions could void the warranty.**