Dive Into Pool Season

Landscaping can enhance a community pool, but may also create additional work.
One community recently placed new flower pots by the pool—large, round terra cotta planters 4 feet tall and about the width of a monster-truck tire—in an attempt to improve curb appeal for an amenity that was hidden away and in need of a “wow” factor. The flowers were beautiful and looked fantastic around the pool area. All that the maintenance team had to do was water them daily, including on the weekends. But apparently a few residents decided that they wanted to pull a stupid prank (and save the maintenance team from working during the weekend), because one Saturday morning the leasing staff found every one of the planters in the pool... while giving a tour of the community! No watering needed.

As the pool filter had run all night, the fine topsoil had completely clogged the sand filter. It was then that I discovered the importance of not only backwashing the pool filter regularly, but also performing this task properly.

A technician knows when it is time to backwash by looking for a 10 psi pressure increase on the pressure gauge found on top of most sand-filter tanks. When this occurs, the technician should turn off the pump, change the valve setting to “backwash” and run the water down the waste line until it is clear. This process reverses the flow of water inside the filter so that trapped debris will be flushed out.

Once this is completed, the pump is once again turned off and the valves are set to “rinse.” This allows the water to flow normally and reset the sand in the filter. The water will still go out through the waste line. The pump only needs to run for 30 to 45 seconds. Once complete, the pump is turned off again and the valve is reset to filter to return to normal.
In addition to the topsoil that was in the sand filter, the plant root balls had sunk to the bottom of the pool. After the settled soil was vacuumed up, stain spots appeared on the plaster.

To remedy this, the maintenance team took a 3-inch PVC pipe long enough to reach the stain from the side of the pool. When doing so, it’s important to carefully pour Muriatic acid in the high end. This should be done while wearing gloves and a respirator, as the acid can be dangerous.

Because the acid is slightly heavier than the water, it will slowly run down the pipe and spread out along the bottom as it disperses into the pool water. This process works well for smaller area stains. With some careful manipulation of the pipe, the stains were removed.

After removing the planters and vacuuming the dirt, the team began treating the water to get it back to swimmable condition. They took into consideration that, while the fertilizer used in the planter helped the flowers to grow, that same fertilizer helped some unwanted bacteria and microbial plants to grow in the water.

To destroy these, the pool was “shocked” by raising the chlorine level to over 20 parts-per-million (ppm). This was accomplished by taking granular chlorine (calcium hypochlorite), adding it to a large bucket of water and then pouring this mixture around the pool edge. The next step was to stand back and keep the pool closed until the chlorine was allowed to return to normal levels.

The pool was ready to go again once the water was cleaned and balanced, even though I’m not sure the same can be said of the flowers.

Communities may consider chaining large pots to the pool fence to prevent a similar situation of theft or vandalism—fortunately a one-time occurrence at this particular community—but if the chain is visible, prospective and current residents may see this as an indicator that there is a crime problem. If vandalism is a potential concern, communities can consider installing a built-in, raised flower bed instead of purchasing pots.

Plant Invasion

Some of the prettiest green algae I’ve ever seen occurred in a pool that was being professionally treated.

The pool service at this community was treating the pool twice a week during that summer. Approximately three-fourths of the way through the season, something green and powdery-looking was seen coating the walls and corners of the steps. If it was brushed, it would go away—only to return the next morning.

The pool service company was told of the issue and they treated the water by closing the pool and increasing the chlorine dosage so that the chlorine was now over 10 ppm.

Because of inactivity in the water, in a couple of days the algae covered the entire pool! Short of planting mangroves and enticing frogs to take up residence in the new swamp, the problem needed to be fixed. Thus, the chlorine was raised even higher to over 25 ppm—now five times the normal level. But even after brushing the walls and removing the algae, it quickly returned.

The solution was to test the water for cyanuric acid (CA). CA is a stabilizer used to slow the chemical reaction that chlorine has when exposed to sunlight.

If the level is too high, the chlorine in the water will not perform its sanitizing function. In this case the CA level was well over the high limit of 100 ppm. As the service was using Tri-Chlor as the chlorination agent, it was continually adding CA to the pool.

To remove the stabilizer, a drain pump was placed on the second step in the pool so that pool water was taken out of the pool from the top. After draining the water halfway down, an unstabilized chlorine was used to “shock” the pool and brush the walls. An algacide designed to fight algae was also used.

Once the CA was removed, the chemicals could do their work and the lily pad order was canceled. n.

Paul Rhodes, CAMT, is NAA Education Institute’s National Safety and Maintenance Instructor.

Make the Right Call

As the weather warms up and residents anxiously await the official opening of the community pool, apartment management companies must ask themselves, “Are we ready for everything that pool season could bring?”

With increased liability exposure, management companies must consider potential emergency situations and ensure that their properties are prepared. Part of this preparation includes testing pool phone equipment prior to opening weekend—as well as regularly throughout the pool season. Doing so is easy and can be done in four simple steps.

1. Initiate a call from the emergency pool phone.
2. Tell the answering operator you are performing a test and ask whether they can hear you properly.
3. Ask the operator if they can identify your location. For ADA compliance, the most important requirement is that the emergency operator answering the call must be able to determine the exact location of the caller without the caller telling them. If the operator cannot—and the building facility or parking lot was built or renovated after July 1994—the phone is not ADA compliant.
4. If your phone does not work, contact an emergency pool phone specialist as soon as possible to assess the problem and provide a customized solution.

In some instances for phones that are programmed to directly call 911, a fee may be charged if too many phone calls are made for non-emergency purposes.

Where applicable, it may be best to utilize automatic self-testing equipment in conjunction with periodic manual tests.

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