



LOSS CONTROL BULLETIN

Another loss prevention service from Bollinger, Inc.

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SWIMMING POOL OPERATIONS #107

Introduction

Swimming pools vary significantly in terms of size, shape, depth, accessory equipment, physical layout, circulation and sanitation systems, and user characteristics. They may be used for a variety of activities, including recreational swimming, lap swimming, wading, diving, aquatic exercise, water polo, scuba classes, lifesaving classes, swim meets, and other events.

Pools may be open for seasonal use or open year-round. Outdoor pools typically have large deck areas where people may sun themselves. These outdoor deck areas may also be used for special events, such as receptions or barbecues. Pools where swimming competitions are held may have spectator areas with bleachers or grandstands. Pools typically will have locker rooms with showers and toilets where people may change into and out of their swim wear.

Pool operations and maintenance may be performed by the club or contracted out to a firm specializing in one or more aspects of aquatic facility management. Programmed activities may be supervised by club employees or the activities may be directed by individuals who are not employed by the club. Businesses, civic groups, athletic associations, or other organizations may use the swimming facilities for special events or programmed activities.

Pool Liability Exposures

Clubs may be liable for deaths, injuries, and illnesses caused by improper pool construction or lack of necessary pool equipment and problems related to pool maintenance, management and supervision. Clubs that sell food, swim wear, or other items at a snack bar or pro shop will have additional liability exposures associated with these ancillary business operations.

Drowning, spinal cord injury, disembowelment, and electrocution are types of severe injuries that may occur. Other injuries that may occur include cuts and abrasions, bruises, burns and scalds, and animal/insect bites. Pools are also a source of transmission of communicable diseases. See Loss Control Bulletin #111 - Waterborne Disease Transmission for more information.

All states have requirements for public swimming pool operation. Compliance with state and local municipal codes (e.g., fire, public health, building, and electrical codes) affecting swimming pool operation is the basis for most pool safety programs. Compliance with these codes is extremely important. Noncompliance with code requirements may be used in lawsuits as evidence of negligence or may even be considered negligence per se. In addition, pools with special uses, such as swimming competitions, may have to meet specific facility design and operation requirements as part of the rules of the competition organization. See Loss Control Bulletin #108 - Swimming Competitions for more information.

Pool Design and Construction

Pools should be designed and constructed according to state and local requirements. Permits from local and state boards of health, as well as the building, plumbing, and electrical departments are required in most locales for pool construction. Many local authorities also require inspections of new and existing facilities before they are opened and periodic inspections during the operating season to ensure that the facility is properly operated and maintained according to local regulations. Refer to Loss Control Guide #109 - Pool Design for safety related pool specifications and construction information.

Pool Management and Supervision

The employees responsible for pool management are the key to safe pool operation. Club management should take steps to ensure that swimmers and other pool users are warned of hazards associated with pool use and are adequately supervised. In addition, club management should be prepared to respond to emergency situations likely to occur at the facility.

Operator Certification

The person in charge of the pool operations should have recognized competence in pool management. Many states, including AK, CO, IA, MN, NY, NJ, and UT, require pool managers to be certified. State certification may be granted to pool managers after they complete a training course run by the state or after completion of a recognized third party training program. Programs such as the Certified Pool Operator (CPO) program of the National Swimming Pool Foundation (NSPF), Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO) of the National Recreation and Parks Association, or the Pool Tech certification of the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals may meet state requirements.

Lifeguards

The number of lifeguards present will depend upon the size of the pool and the number of users expected in the facility at one time. This requirement is typically specified in local pool safety regulations. Lifeguards should be attired so that they are readily identifiable as members of the lifeguard staff.

Lifeguards should be competently trained, be certified in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and have completed a nationally recognized lifeguard training program, such as the American Red Cross Lifeguarding, YMCA Lifeguarding, Boy Scouts of America Lifeguard, or National Pool and Waterpark lifeguard training. The club should maintain a file of all current certifications, including expiration dates.

The pool should have elevated lifeguard chairs to improve the lifeguard's ability to supervise the pool. The number of chairs required will vary depending upon the size of the pool. See Loss Control Bulletin #109 for guidelines. Lifeguards should be assigned no other duties while they are supervising use of the pool.

Access Restrictions

Pool use should be limited to authorized persons and users should be required to sign in and out of the pool area. The sign-in sheet should include the statement that the user is aware of the dangers of swimming and agrees to abide by the rules of conduct of the facility. Once the pool area has reached its stated capacity, access to the area should be restricted until the pool loading decreases.

Programmed Activities

Schedules of programmed activities, such as swimming lessons, aquatic exercise or water sports should be posted. Participants in such activities should be required to sign a release, hold harmless agreement, or waiver of claim form prior to engaging in such activities. If necessary, the pool should be closed to other users while these activities are being performed. Individuals supervising activities and providing instruction should have recognized competence and appropriate certification for directing the programmed activity.

Pool Safety Equipment and Procedures

Signs

Safety-related regulations should be posted in the pool area and include the following:

- the maximum capacity of the pool

- the hours the pool is open
- a prohibition against using the pool when it is closed
- a prohibition against diving, unless the area meets minimum requirements for diving
- a prohibition against other inappropriate pool conduct (e.g., splashing or spitting)

Lifeguards should have the authority to enforce these requirements, including the ability to exclude or remove unruly people from the pool.

Pool users should be notified of temporary conditions that make swimming inappropriate, such as when pool water is being treated to restore sanitary conditions. Pool users should also be warned about temporary conditions making the pool area more hazardous, such as deck cleaning or repair operations.

Safety Equipment

The pool should maintain appropriate life saving equipment. This equipment should include a backboard, a reaching pole with body hook (also known as a “Shepherd’s Crook”), and lines with flotation devices (rescue tube and ring buoy) attached. Other devices may be required at larger pools. Local codes usually specify the exact items and number of equipment that must be on hand. This equipment should be mounted in conspicuous places, distributed around the swimming pool deck, readily accessible, and kept in repair and ready condition.

Pools should have at least one working telephone or emergency call device within or adjacent to the pool area. These devices should be clearly identified by sign and distinct color. Emergency procedures should be posted on, or near, all calling devices. These signs should include any special dialing instructions (e.g., dial “9” to access an outside line).

First Aid Equipment

The pool should have at least one first aid kit placed in a location that the staff can quickly access. The kit should comply with the recommendations of either the American Red Cross or the American College of Sports medicine. The contents of the kit should be checked at least monthly and restocked as necessary.

Emergency Procedures

Clubs should have a written emergency plan describing the steps that should be taken in the event of an emergency. This plan should include procedures for water emergencies, such as drowning, as well as evacuations for severe weather, storms with lightning, and other causes, and fire-related emergencies. Staff should be trained in the plan procedures. Drills should be performed on a regular basis to maintain staff readiness. Also, pool staff should never delay or refuse to call 911 for a guest in an emergency situation.

Pool Operation and Maintenance Procedures

Operation and maintenance procedures should be in place to ensure that water in the pool is sanitary and that the pool structure and equipment will not cause accidents or injuries. All inspections and corrective actions should be documented in an operations or maintenance log. If a contractor does this work, up to date certificates of insurance should be obtained from the contractor.

Water Level

Monitor water levels on a regular basis and add make-up water as necessary to maintain marked levels. Post signs warning guests if water level has been significantly lowered or if the pool has been drained for repairs or maintenance.

Water Clarity

Filter and treat the water to maintain clarity. Clarity is important for making swimmers aware of the depth of the water and the presence of any below water obstructions. Cloudy water may prevent lifeguards from being able to monitor the pool bottom for people in need of assistance or may interfere with a rescue operation.

Water Quality

Regularly filter and treat pool water and monitor water quality to provide sanitary conditions for the pool users. Public health codes typically specify requirements for water filtration rates, chemical and biological values, and turbidity of pool water. If water quality drops below acceptable levels, pool use should be suspended until the water quality is restored.

Pool Cleaning

Clean skimmer baskets or other devices used to remove floating debris from the surface of the pool and remove sediment, sludge, and other waste accumulations from the bottom of pools on a regular basis. Staff should remove large items, such as branches as soon as they are discovered.

Chemical Handling and Storage

Handle and store pool treatment chemicals in accordance with local codes and industry standards for the specific chemicals. In general, pool chemicals should be stored in original containers in a secure, (preferably locked) cool, dry, ventilated area separated from incompatible substances and kept out of the reach of children. The chemical storage area should not be used for any other storage. The Chlorine Institute provides detailed recommendations for handling and storing chlorine at public swimming pools. NFPA 430, Code for the Storage of Liquid and Solid Oxidizers, is another frequently referenced source of requirements.

Pool Equipment

Inspect all diving boards, slides, ropes, and other pool equipment daily. Remove damaged equipment or prevent the use of the equipment until it can be repaired. Repairs should be completed by employees trained in proper maintenance techniques, or by outside contractors. Repairs should be inspected before the item is put back in service. A log should be kept of when the item was repaired and by whom, and stickers placed on the equipment as a means of repair identification.

Pool Decks

Inspect pool decks on a regular basis for cracks, obstructions, and other hazardous conditions. Clean and sanitize pool decks using an approved cleanser. Post signs during any cleaning operation to warn pool users of any hazards created by the cleaning operation (exposure to harmful chemicals, the presence of water puddles, etc.).

Pool Furniture

Inspect pool furniture and accessories (tables, chairs, pool umbrellas, etc.) on a regular basis. Inspect these items for damaged or uneven chair and table legs; rough surfaces, splinters, chips or cracks; loose or missing fasteners; and protruding springs. Remove damaged items until they can be repaired. Clean and sanitize pool furniture on a regular basis.

Amusement Devices

Pools may provide amusement devices, such as volleyball nets, floating baskets, floats or other devices. Require users to sign these devices out and return them when they are finished using the equipment. The devices should be kept in good condition and inspected before each use.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - The information and suggestions presented by Bollinger Inc. in this Loss Control Bulletin are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your club, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related, or other, laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter them to fit the specific hazards of your club and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and club's policies.

For bulletins on other safety topics see our website www.bollingerinsurance.com/newver/Golf/index.asp