

Ask Al

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Welcome back to our “Ask the Expert” feature, designed to assist you with issues related to swimming pool water, mechanical equipment, space conditioning and code compliance. Ask a question, and we will try to answer to the best of our ability.

Q: We have a busy swim school, and every time we cancel lessons it costs us a lot of money. Some customers get aggravated with us, and NEVER come back. What can we do to better prepare ourselves for the unexpected?

A: Most successful swim school owners agree that one should take any necessary steps to avoid the cancellation of lessons as it IS time consuming, embarrassing, and expensive.

The most common mechanical reasons for cancellations are **poor water chemistry or filtration, cold pool, and unsafe or irritating air and water conditions**. What can you do to be more prepared? Here are a few hints.

Poor Water Chemistry or Filtration: Poor water chemistry can cause severe eye and skin irritation and can contribute to poor water quality. Remember, many health codes require that you close the pool if you cannot readily see the main

drain. Also a cloudy pool looks dirty and unsafe, and protective parents will shy away from subjecting their precious ones to unsafe conditions.

What you can do:

- A reliable and accurate automatic chemistry control system is a **MUST!** One that alerts you and your staff (*via texts and email*) of any out of range condition is even better.
- Daily (*or better yet – multiple readings per day*) water tests using either a commercial-grade drop count test kit or a Photometer is a minimum investment in time. This will help verify that your system is “in control”.
- A reliable chlorinator and pH feeder set to maintain >750 mV of ORP with < 3 PPM of Chlorine while maintaining a pH between 7.3 and 7.6. Any deviation from these parameters requires immediate attention.
- All chemical feeders **SHOULD** be on a **PROACTIVE** service program, so you are **NOT** waiting until they break to give them attention.
- You should have spare parts for all feeders, or even spare feeders, and your staff should be trained and confident servicing these, **OR**, you should have an **ON-CALL** arrangement with an outside vendor.

Cold Pool: Most swim schools swear by their 90-91F pool temperature as optimum for lessons, but your indoor pool (*or even your outdoor pool*) **WILL NOT** reach 91F on its own. So, a functioning and reliable heating system is a must! In fact, redundant heating systems are gaining in popularity. Heating pool water with your dehumidification system has been a documented success; but a back up heater should be in place and can be gas, heat pump or electric.

What you can do:

- You **SHOULD** have a proactive service plan on your heating system, backed by a company that is factory certified on your particular brand. Once to twice a year service is not uncommon, and is a good investment.
- You should consider stocking some critical parts at your site, or make sure your service company does. Why? Today, many manufacturers are adhering to “lean” inventory programs meaning they don’t have the stuff on hand when you need it. If they do, it takes them days or weeks to get it to you. Distributors and service companies are maintaining lower inventory levels to stay healthy, so they might not have the parts either.

- Your service company should offer nighttime or emergency service. If they don't, find a factory service center that does! If you have gas, check with a local factory rep to see whom they use for start-ups and factory service. This **MUST** be arranged **BEFORE** you have a problem.

- If you use a heat pump for primary heating, you should have a backup heater for times when the air temperature drops below 50F. Heat pumps shut off for self-protection at that temperature so no heating will be provided.

Unsafe or Irritating Air or Water Conditions: There is a wide variety of unsafe or irritating conditions including risk of serious electrical or entrapment issues, skin and eye irritation due to chloramines or other irritants, and stifling or noxious air and water conditions. You need to listen closely to comments and complaints from your staff **FIRST** as they are in the room and the water longer than any other patrons,

and they give you important feedback to the condition of your pool.

What you can do:

- Make sure that your equipment room mechanical systems are operating per manufacturer's guidelines to prevent issues, and that they are being serviced on a proactive plan from a licensed and certified pool service contractor.

- Make sure that your entire pool operation complies with all local health department codes. You may want to download the new Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC), and use that as your guide as many feel that it is going to become the new "best practice" for pools.

- If your staff complains of skin irritation, you must take quick and decisive steps. First, if you are not diluting pool water, you should immediately dilute 4 gallons per bather. So if you have 1,000 bathers this week, and your backwash system only used 500 gallons, then you need

to dump an additional 500 gallons. Dilution is the solution to pollution.

- Check to see that your dehumidification (or fan exhaust) system is in good working order, and arrange periodic proactive maintenance. Positive pressure (air blows out into your viewing areas), stifling heat, toxic odors, etc. are signs that something is awry.

- Make sure that your UV system is in good working order and providing at least 60 ml dose. Test chloramines often to make sure you are staying below 0.4 PPM, and provide proactive service on the UV twice a year.

Conclusion:

The leading pool school owners know that, while they offer parties and other forms of revenue, pleasing and irritant-free water is **THE** most important thing a school has to offer. Some operators have **NO** proactive service plans on their single heater, and then are upset when they have to cancel lessons due to a cold pool, while others are very prepared and have even pre-arranged preventive maintenance on all major equipment, thus experiencing few emergencies.

There are certainties in life...death, taxes and the fact that mechanical devices, no matter how good they are, will eventually need service or will fail. Staying in a proactive mode will help you avoid issues, prevent you from canceling lessons and will cost you much less than a reactive strategy.

Best Regards,

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Please feel free to forward your questions & comments through the USSSA office, or directly to me via email at amendoza@ceswaterquality.com