

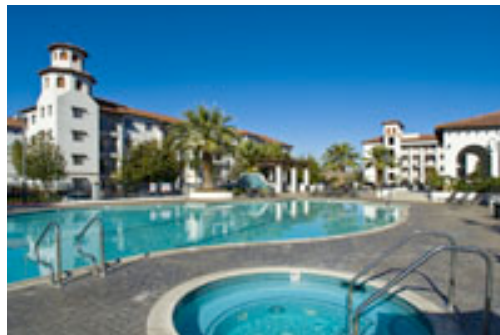
INDUSTRY NEWS

Pool Safety Act to Go into Effect In December; New Drain Covers Required

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By Erika Schnitzer, Associate Editor

Washington, D.C.--In response to the rising number of injuries and deaths caused by the suction of swimming pool drains, President George W. Bush has signed into law the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Safety Act. This Act will affect all public pools and spas, including those in apartment and condominium communities.



Suction entrapment can occur when a swimmer gets sucked into a pool or spa's water circulation system, similar to the way a vacuum cleaner can stick to a person's palm, explains Paul Pennington, founding member of the Pool Safety Consortium, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that educates consumers on current legislation and safety devices. However, in a pool, "The pump has a suction force equal to 500 pounds of force," he says.

The Act, which goes into effect on December 19, 2008, states that the drain covers on a public swimming pool or spa must meet certain requirements--compliant to A112.19.8 standards—including that it be tested for structural integrity and body and hair entrapment, as well as displaying a flow value in gallons per minutes (gpm). "To prove those are approved to the standard, they must have a permanent stamp that says it's approved to the 2007 version, and it must also give the rating of how many gallons per minute it's rated to handle," Pennington tells *MHN*.

The Act also states that the drains must be un-blockable, meaning that a human body cannot block it and create a suction entrapment hazard. Finally, any public pool spa with a single main drain, or a suction outlet connected to a pool pump, must also have an additional device such as a safety vacuum release system (SVRS), suction-limiting vent system, gravity drainage system, automatic pump shut-off system or drain disablement.

"You can have the best drain cover in the world and it can still come off--that's why you want a back-up protection," asserts Pennington. "The next layer of protection is important because the covers may not stay on," due to the possibilities of rusted screws and/or stripped screw holes.

On or after December 19, those found not in compliance with the ruling will be subject to fines of \$1.825 million, as well as criminal penalties. While property managers may choose to put in entirely new drains—which would be exempt from the ruling—Pennington asserts that this is by no means necessary. However, managers should know that drain cover companies have only received approval of covers with meeting these new standards within the last three months. Thus, "Anything that was purchased prior to three months ago is not going to be accepted or legal," Pennington notes.