

Risk Management

by Michael Gentile, J.D.

Simple inspection reduces maintenance and increases swimming pool safety for guests

In a new hotel with a new swimming pool, it would be safe to assume that the pool is constructed with all the safeguards and technology that make it easy to keep it clean and well-maintained while assuring the safety of guests who use that pool. In older properties it could be dangerous to make that same assumption. But that does not mean the pool of an older property cannot be clean, well-maintained and safe.

And care for the pool area does not have to be cost prohibitive. Care and maintenance for the pool begins with a regular, yet simple inspection process to identify at an early stage any conditions that could affect the operation and safety of the pool. The inspection process can then be combined with a preventive maintenance program for regular upkeep of the pool area, thus avoiding major repairs while effectively managing all potential risk of loss in the pool area.

The inspection process can be divided into three categories: layout, operation and safety. The items in these categories may overlap somewhat but the repetition only helps to ensure that all goals of the inspection and maintenance program are met.

Layout

For the purposes of this inspection process, layout consists of the physical design of the pool area, visibility, lighting, signage, storage and traffic patterns. The inspection can be accomplished on a regular basis by requiring maintenance, housekeeping, and pool and fitness staff to take note of conditions in and around the pool as they perform their job functions. To make this easier a checklist can be created. The checklist might contain the following items:

- Pool area is well lit and overhead lights are functional
- All underwater swimming pools lights are functional and not leaking
- The floor of the swimming pool is visible from each deck of the pool
- Entrance/exits are marked and visible
- Decks and walkways are slip-resistant
- Walkways are free of debris and properly drained
- Appropriate signage for pool safety is in place and prominently visible, including pool rules, hours of use, and signage as regulated by the local government or board of health
- Water depths are clearly marked and visible above the water level on both a vertical wall and the edge of the pool deck. Depths should be marked in both feet and meters with the appropriate measurement indicator following each number
- Chemicals are stored and secured properly
- Rescue equipment is visible, accessible, and stored properly
- Provision has been made for monitoring pool usage by employing lifeguards, closed circuit television, or some other means

- Provision has been made to restrict access to pool area after hours (i.e. through locking doors or locked gates)
- Provision has been made to restrict access to small, unaccompanied children through safety locking mechanisms on doors or gates that young children may not reach or open
- Rust resistant, lightweight deck furniture that does not contain glass, sharp edges, and is in good repair.

Deficiencies in the layout category could require significant renovations or repair. Some items may be serious and could require temporary signage or closures of certain areas within the pool to transfer or avoid the risk of loss. Prompt discovery and immediate intervention can avoid potential injury and extensive repair costs.

Operations

The operations area can be observed and monitored by the maintenance, housekeeping, and pool and fitness staff on the property. The checklist in this area could consist of the following items:

- Pool has been vacuumed daily
- Water quality is tested frequently and within acceptable ph levels
- No visible algae growth or discolored water
- No unpleasant odors or ventilation problems
- Drains are clean, working properly, and secured by a non-removable grate or screen
- Ladders are secured, stored and have no discernible damage
- Storage areas clean and uncluttered
- Decks have been cleaned and sanitized at appropriate intervals

It is imperative that any deficiencies found in the operations category be addressed quickly. Most corrective actions that will be required are likely to be minimal and may involve cleaning, draining or water testing. However, if these conditions remain unchecked, significant health, safety or major repair issues may develop resulting in potential injury to a guest or liability and potential risk of economic loss to the hotel.

Safety

This category is the overriding concern in most pool areas. Many, if not all of the checklist items in the layout and operations areas are effective in enhancing safety as well as serving to minimize damage and mitigate loss. The safety category items should be the responsibility of every staff member who comes in contact with the pool area. Some specific items could be included on a checklist made available to all personnel in this area. That checklist should include:

- The pool area is monitored, through either the use of lifeguards, closed circuit television cameras, frequent inspections/walk-throughs or some other means
- Emergency telephone or alarm available with emergency numbers posted
- Signage for all safety rules posted and visible
- Chemicals are properly labeled, stored, and display appropriate warnings
- Emergency equipment is present (including ring buoy, extension poles, shepherd's crook, backboard, and first aid kits)
- All floor and deck items in the layout category are functional and maintained

- Personnel are properly trained and present when assigned

Summary

The goal of this or any inspection program is to make the inspection of the pool area a priority and to create a process where a multitude of personnel exercise the responsibility to identify areas that need to be addressed. By having a number of staffers aware of items on the pool checklists, early notification of deficiencies can be provided to management. These deficiencies, if corrected quickly, can prevent harm to guests and reduce further maintenance costs and potential liability to management and ownership.

Read more about it:

- In the next issue of TRC, read about various governmental regulations for operators of hotel swimming pools.
- Related articles in TRC include Vol. 4, No. 3 “Limiting Liability of Swimming Pools” and Vol. 7, No. 3 “Hotel Signage is Essential Safety Precaution.”

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