

MANAGEMENT OF SWIMMING POOL, HOT TUB, AND SPA WATER DISCHARGES

This fact sheet addresses the discharge of water from swimming pools, hot tubs, and spas that are disinfected using chlorine, bromine, or “salt water disinfection,” and that also may contain residual amounts of other treatment chemicals including algaecides. Servicing of a pool, hot tub, or spa often involves discharging all or a portion of the water or backwash water from filters, both of which may contain residual chlorine at levels that could be damaging to the environment. As such, these waters may be considered “polluted” (i.e., “wastewater”), and must be managed to protect public health and to prevent pollution to waters of the commonwealth such as rivers, streams, lakes, and including storm sewers. The purpose of this fact sheet is to describe acceptable methods of managing discharges from swimming pools, hot tubs, and spas to avoid causing pollution. Pool, hot tub, and spa water should not be allowed to directly or indirectly discharge to waters of the commonwealth, including storm sewers.

What substances in pools, hot tubs, or spas could cause pollution?

Chlorine and/or other disinfectants are typically added in sufficient amounts to kill potentially harmful bacteria. These disinfectants also react with other organic matter such as dirt, sweat, skin cells, leaves, and organisms creating potentially harmful disinfection byproducts. Other contaminants are added from the users, such as oil and grease from natural body oils and applied lotions and sunscreens. Chemicals commonly used in maintaining these systems, such as salt, borax, algaecides, phenols, caustic, and acid solutions, can be deadly to fish and other aquatic life. Backwashing of pool filters also contributes accumulated debris. All of these chemicals and materials have the potential to cause pollution and adversely affect public health and waters of the commonwealth.

What are acceptable methods for managing swimming pool, hot tub, and spa waters?

The best approach for managing these wastewaters is disposal into a public sewer system or at a sewage treatment facility, with authorization of the sewer system owner. A permit is generally not necessary to reuse or recycle pool wastewaters, but approval from the owner of a sewer system or sewage treatment facility is typically required. Some municipalities have enacted additional requirements related to discharges from pools. Contact your municipality if you’re unsure whether additional guidelines exist.

What if no public sewer is available?

The wastewater can be drained and allowed to infiltrate into a vegetated area or used for on-site irrigation after these guidelines are met:

1. Shut off the chlorination/chemical feed system if there is one, or stop adding chlorine and chemicals.
2. Shut off the heating system, if there is one.
3. Hold the water in the pool or hot tub to reduce the chlorine level to 0.5 mg/L or less (if applicable), and the temperature to an acceptable level (generally within 10° F of the air temperature).
4. Test frequently – the water may need to be held for 10 days or more depending on the surrounding conditions. Recirculating the water may help to speed up this process.
5. Adjust the pH, if necessary, to between 6.0 and 9.0 standard units.
6. Never drain the pool on a rainy day or if the soil is saturated.

When discharging on-site for infiltration or using the water for irrigation, ensure that:

- The water will not flow into a storm sewer or other water of the commonwealth.
- The water does not run off the property.
- Nuisances such as prolonged ponding, odors, and mosquito breeding conditions are prevented.
- The flow rate is slow enough to allow infiltration and does not cause erosion.
- Solids are captured by attaching a filter bag to the end of the discharge hose, if needed.

May water from swimming pools, hot tubs, or spas be discharged to onlot septic systems?

No, pool water should not be discharged into or on the surface of onlot systems because the system is not designed for the additional flow and the contaminants could impact the operation.

May chemicals (e.g., strong acids or caustics) be used to clean my pool, hot tub, or spa?

Yes, as long as the wastewater is captured or collected, properly treated and disposed of, and prevented from entering waters of the commonwealth, including storm sewers.

How should wastewater from cleaning my pool be handled, properly treated and disposed of?

Cleaning wastewaters that contain acid, caustics, or chlorine rinses used to clean pool surfaces should be treated prior to discharge. All wastewaters, but especially cleaning wastewater, must be neutralized to a pH between 6.0 and 9.0 standard units. Chlorine rinses can be dechlorinated or should stand for a period of 10 days to allow chlorine degradation to a residual of 0.5 mg/L or less prior to discharge.

Any pool wastewaters that have unnatural cloudiness, color, oil film, solids, foam, debris, vegetation, algae, or are not or cannot be properly treated, should be collected and hauled to a treatment facility in accordance with the facility’s guidelines.

What should be done with standing water that has accumulated in a pool?

Standing water, accumulated rainfall, or pool water from the previous season should be pumped from the top, but only if the chlorine residual and pH values are acceptable, to avoid disturbing solids on the pool bottom, which should not be discharged. After the water has been pumped, manually clean out the solids.

Could someone who causes pollution by discharging water from swimming pools, hot tubs, or spas be penalized?

If DEP determines that the management of swimming pool, hot tub, and spa wastewaters has caused pollution to waters of the commonwealth, the responsible party could be liable for civil penalties up to \$10,000 per day under the Clean Streams Law.

For questions and additional information, contact the Clean Water Program in DEP’s regional offices:

Northwest Regional Office
230 Chestnut St.
Meadville, PA 16335-3481
Main Telephone: 814-332-6945
24-Hour Emergency: 800-373-3398
Counties: *Armstrong, Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango, and Warren*

North-central Regional Office
208 W. Third St., Suite 101
Williamsport, PA 17701-6448
Main Telephone: 570-327-3636
24-Hour Emergency: 570-327-3636
Counties: *Bradford, Cameron, Clearfield, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga, and Union*

Northeast Regional Office
2 Public Square
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701-1915
Main Telephone: 570-826-2511
24-Hour Emergency: 570-826-2511
Counties: *Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Wyoming*

Southwest Regional Office
400 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4745
Main Telephone: 412-442-4000
24-Hour Emergency: 412-442-4000
Counties: *Allegheny, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Somerset, Washington, and Westmoreland*

South-central Regional Office
909 Elmerton Ave.
Harrisburg, PA 17110-8200
Main Telephone: 717-705-4700
24-Hour Emergency: 866-825-0208
Counties: *Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry, and York*

Southeast Regional Office
2 East Main St.
Norristown, PA 19401-4915
Main Telephone: 484-250-5900
24-Hour Emergency: 484-250-5900
Counties: *Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia*

For more information, visit www.dep.pa.gov.