

Keep the Pool Clean and Clear for Kid Safety

By Terry Arko
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The weather is heating up. Summer's on the way and that means kids will be gathering around a swimming pool. It could be a private backyard, a public swimming pool or at a hotel or vacation resort. The enticement of cool, blue water will draw millions of people this summer. Tragically, thousands of these water seekers will be kids who become victims of drowning. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) drowning is the second leading cause of death from injury among persons aged 1-14 years. In 2003, there were a total of 3,386 deaths from drowning. It may be surprising to learn that 90% of children between the ages of 1 and 14 were under supervision when they drowned. While there are many factors that can contribute to a drowning incident, many safety programs miss an important aspect that can prevent drowning deaths in a supervised environment. Water clarity is vital in the prevention of drowning. A recent article in the Los Angeles Times pointed out concern among safety experts at the number of drownings that occurred in a supervised setting (Los Angeles Times, March 28, 2007).

All of these drownings occurred in swimming pools that were described as murky and cloudy. So cloudy in fact that one could not see very far beneath the surface. In June 2002, a seven-year-old child drowned during a pool party, where more than 30 people were present. The pool was so cloudy that no one could see the boy drowning in the deep end. The boy's parents called the police, and they spent two days looking for him. Finally, a detective thought to look in the pool, and the boy's body was found on the pool floor (Los Angeles Times, June 6, 2002).

"The Book on Water Clarity" published in 2005 by SeaKlear, gives three prime reasons why water clarity in swimming pools is important. The three reasons are as follows: appearance, disease prevention and swimmer safety. Number one is for aesthetic reasons, as the majority of swimmers will want to swim in clear blue water. On their consumer website, HealthyPools.org, the CDC recommends to patrons of public aquatic facilities to swim only if the water looks "clear, clean and blue." This CDC advice leads to the second reason – disease prevention. Besides drowning risk, cloudy water in swimming pools indicates a lack of germ fighting disinfectant. Swimming

in cloudy swimming pool water could mean an increased risk of sickness from pathogenic forms of bacteria such as *E.coli* and *Pseudomonas*. This can lead to sickness such as earaches, stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhea and pink eye. Another threat of sickness can come from a chlorine resistant protozoan known as *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto). This nasty bug can cause flu like symptoms and even death in small children. The CDC recommends high levels of chlorine along with good filtration to fight Crypto. However, many pool filters can't catch the small micron-sized creature so an EPA approved clarifier system such as SeaKlear PRS is available to help filters trap Crypto.

Finally, we come to what I feel is the most vital reason for water clarity in swimming pools – swimmer safety. Accidents and injuries can occur when swimmers can't be seen under the surface. When it comes to drowning prevention, clear visibility of the victim can mean the difference between life and death. Drowning is sometimes referred to as a silent killer. Unlike what we see in Hollywood movies, most drowning victims do not call out for help and thrash about. According to the CEO of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, when kids drown, "It is a silent thing because they are under water. They are trying to get themselves to a point where they can breathe, and as they breathe, they just suck in more water" (CNN.com Report: Most children who drown are supervised, May 27, 2004). Numerous safety and health experts state that it only takes two minutes for a child to lose consciousness, irreversible brain damage can occur within four to six minutes and most children who die are found after 10 minutes (Clear Danger-A National Study of Childhood Drowning and Related Attitudes and Behaviors, Safe Kids USA, April 2004).

Obviously, the sooner a child who is struggling under the water is spotted, the greater his or her chances of being rescued are. Many of the drownings in cloudy, murky swimming pools occurred during parties where numerous adults were supervising. A 12-year old boy in Alameda County drowned

during a house warming party. The boy had been missing for 30 minutes and the police were called. Later, his body was found in a very cloudy swimming pool at the residence (San Francisco Chronicle, August 28, 2001). Public swimming facilities are regulated to maintain water clarity. Health inspectors will close a public pool if the floor drain is not clearly visible from the top deck. Unfortunately, backyard pools aren't regulated and it is up to the individual owners to keep the pool up. Here's my advice to owners of residential pools. Make sure you understand

the chemistry and equipment workings of the pool if you plan to take care of it yourself. If you hire a service professional, make sure they are certified in water chemistry and equipment maintenance.

Swimming should never be allowed when the bottom of

the pool cannot be seen clearly. When hosting or attending pool parties, keep children in sight at all times. Go to www.safekids.usa.org and find out about their water watcher program. Here you can download tags that can be laminated and given to adults. The tags state that as long as it is in someone's possession, they are responsible to actively watch all swimmers in the pool. If during a party water cloudiness prevents clear vision then get the kids out of the pool. You may be labeled as a killjoy but then you also may save a life. Proper fencing, self-latching gates, alarms and responsible supervision are all good safety measures. But let's not forget that clear water is also an important safety factor for drowning prevention. Remember, keep the pool clear to keep kids safe. Visit www.seaklear.com to learn more about products that treat and prevent cloudy water.

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