

Fact Sheet

Public swimming and spa pools after an emergency or power cut

Advice for operators of public swimming and spa pools following power outages, bushfires, floods or storms.

Public swimming and spa pool water quality can be adversely affected by power outages, bushfires, floods and storms, making them unsafe to use. The South Australian Public Health (General) Regulations 2013 (the Regulations) requires public pool operators to ensure filtration and disinfection equipment is operating effectively at all times when a public pool is open for use.

Power outages

Public swimming pools and spa pools rely on electricity for the operation of pumps, filters, UV systems and automatic disinfection equipment.

In the event of a power outage, the pool must be immediately closed to the public and all bathers must be required to exit the pool. A barrier, sign or similar device must be erected or displayed in a conspicuous place near the pool indicating that the pool is closed to the public or public access to the pool must be prevented by means of closed and locked doors or gates.

When power is restored, all electrical equipment must be checked for correct functioning.

Bushfires

After a bushfire, public swimming pools may contain debris including ash. This may affect the water chemistry making it unsafe for use.

The pool must be closed to the public until tests and observations confirm that the pool's disinfectant concentration, pH, alkalinity and water clarity are within the prescribed ranges specified in the Regulations.

A barrier, sign or similar device must be erected or displayed in a conspicuous place near the pool indicating that the pool is closed to the public or public access to the pool must be prevented by means of closed and locked doors or gates. This may prove difficult, particularly if fences have been damaged. Consider temporary fencing if necessary.

Remove debris and ash from the pool and clean out the skimmer and pump baskets. Then turn the pump on to remove remaining debris.

If contamination is substantial, you may need to use a flocculant. This will bind the contaminants together and cause them to drop to the bottom of the pool where they can be scooped or vacuumed to waste.

Finally, clean your filtration unit. For cartridge filters, remove the cartridge and hose it thoroughly or replace if necessary. For sand and media filters, backwash and rinse the filter.

If contamination is so extensive that the pool requires emptying, you'll need to clean the entire pool, including surrounding structures and associated plumbing. After refilling and treating the new pool water, check the water quality before allowing anyone to use the pool.



Floods or storms

When a swimming pool has been inundated with flood or storm water there are many issues that need to be considered. It is essential to assess the condition of the swimming pool and make it safe before starting any work.

A barrier, sign or similar device must be erected or displayed in a conspicuous place near the pool indicating that the pool is closed to the public or public access to the pool must be prevented by means of closed and locked doors or gates. This may prove difficult, particularly if fences have been damaged or debris has made the area dangerous. Consider temporary fencing if necessary.

Once the floodwaters have receded the swimming pool must be assessed to determine the condition of the infrastructure. Check pumps and pipe infrastructure for cracks or ruptures and remove debris from the pool. Check the pool surrounds for wash outs, missing paving materials and deposited debris. The pool may need to be emptied and cleaned out to allow a full assessment of the damage.

If the swimming pool pump, dosing unit or any other electrical equipment has been inundated, a licensed electrician should check the circuits and each electrical item to ensure integrity and safety.

The water is likely to be very dirty and any attempt to filter the water will rapidly clog the filter. In this circumstance you will need to flocculate the pool water to precipitate and remove the suspended colloidal soil material. The flocculated material should be vacuumed to waste and not filtered. Once the pool has been flocculated the pool filter can be turned back on to circulate and filter the water.

Pool filters will require cleaning. For cartridge filters, remove the cartridge and hose it down thoroughly or replace if necessary. For sand or media filters, backwash and rinse the filter.

If contamination is so extensive that the pool requires emptying, you'll need to clean the entire pool, including surrounding structures and associated plumbing. After refilling and treating the new pool water, check the water quality before allowing anyone to use the pool.

Before reopening

Public pools and spas must not be reopened to the public until tests and observations confirm that the pool's disinfectant concentration, pH, alkalinity and water clarity are within the prescribed ranges specified in the Regulations.

All test results must be recorded. Records must be kept for a period of two years and made available for inspection at any time on request by an authorised officer.

If further advice is required before reopening, contact an environmental health officer at your local council.

For more information

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