

[front page](#)

[news](#)

[back issues](#)

[comment](#)

[letters](#)

[advertise](#)

[subscribe](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

[back page](#)

Keeping it clean: pool water under scrutiny

It seems that pool water engineers may not be quite the influential force they once were. The Leisure Review spoke to a pool water expert to hear his concerns about current attitudes to pool water management and the skills required to do the job properly.

With the summer school holidays imminent swimming pools around the UK will be preparing for a sharp rise in the number of people coming through their doors. An increase in visitor numbers means an increase in pressure on facilities and managers, not least in the area of the pool itself. An increased bather load puts pressure on the facility's pool water treatment regime, bringing an increased risk of infection if the treatment procedures are found wanting.

And it seems that in a worrying number of cases pool water treatment regimes are being found wanting. Among pool water experts there are growing concerns that standards are slipping and that public health might ultimately be put at risk by poor design and poor management procedures.

Robbie Phillips is the senior plant tutor for the Swimming Teachers' Association (STA) and has as much experience as anyone in the field of pool water management. He has recently been working with environmental health officers and the STA on a pilot project in Wales initially to check pool plant operation basics and for a new approach to the delivery of pool water qualifications, an approach that is shortly to be rolled out across the UK, and he told The Leisure Review that he is becoming increasingly concerned by some of the current attitudes and approaches to pool water management.

"It is actually quite alarming," he said. "I've been in the industry for over 40 years and I've seen a gradual decline in standards among pool contractors, operators, architects and engineers. Pool plant engineers used to be respected but now a considerable number of sites don't know who is in charge of their pool plant. And, of course, until something goes wrong I don't think the industry realises the costs. At the moment the priority is not on pool water quality.

"In recent years demand for pool plant courses has dropped. It seems that some people think they don't need it but there is also a lack of understanding of what proper pool water management involves. I've spoken to a lot of pool plant experts and they seem to be finding similar situations. Often a member of staff with a Level 2 qualification is left in charge but Level 2 is a one-day course, which is not really appropriate. Given that pool water treatment involves the use of potentially dangerous chemicals it really is a recipe for disaster.

"A lot of people are saying that they haven't got the money for training but this really is a short-term attitude. One recent cryptosporidium outbreak cost a centre £450,000 plus the implications to the business of the loss of reputation."

Phillips has seen an increased interest in pool water management among environmental health officers, all of whom are well aware of pool operators' legal requirements to provide a safe, hygienic environment in all swimming facilities. He has been working closely with environmental health officials as part of the pilot scheme for qualifications.

www.theleisurereview.co.uk

"In too many cases the poor old front-line manager is given kit that is not really fit for purpose and then left to get on with it as best they can."

The Leisure Review is supported by:



The Leisure Review is written, designed and published by:

tlr.comms
TLR Communications Limited

“We are seeing environmental health increasingly willing to take the lead on this issue,” Phillips said, “which is really a shame for the leisure industry. I’m not sure that the prevalence of a design-and-build approach to pool projects has helped. There is potentially a huge gap between the knowledge and experience of a design-and-build contractor and one what might term a bona fide pool water management provider. I don’t want to be critical of all contractors but too many have been found wanting.

“In one incident the swimming pool had simple design faults which created a cryptosporidium outbreak. In too many cases the poor old front-line manager is given kit that is not really fit for purpose and then left to get on with it as best they can.”

The STA response to the challenges of such changing attitudes and expectations has been to revamp its pool water treatment qualifications “in line with modern practices and at costs that meet current economic requirements”. Their new Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications are being offered with a range of optional units to cover operators’ specific requirements; the Level 3 pool plant operations course will include units on spas, interactive play features and energy conservation, along with health and safety.

Particular attention has been paid to the special demands of hydrotherapy pools to ensure that staff responsible for the management of pools in facilities such as special schools, where hydrotherapy pools are common, are trained to the correct standard and are able to maintain safe bathing conditions.

“In many hydro pools the water is kept at high temperatures, which demand increased levels of disinfectant at the correct pH,” Phillips said. “The management of this is crucial and in my experience many pool plant operators have not been trained sufficiently in hydro pool management, which can cause costly shut-downs and long-term damage to equipment and most seriously dangers to health.”

To the casual observer phrases such as “modern practices” and “current economic requirements” might seem like euphemisms for cost-cutting but whatever the financial realities of contemporary facility management, Robbie Phillips is clear that more than money is at stake.

“An outbreak of cryptosporidium or legionella can ruin your business overnight,” he said. “Don’t wait for the next outbreak. Action now might be a life-saver.”

Full details of the STA pool water treatment qualifications at www.sta.co.uk/leisure-management-qualifications

The Leisure Review, June 2013

© Copyright of all material on this site is retained by *The Leisure Review* or the individual contributors where stated. Contact *The Leisure Review* for details.