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The Handyman France Idiots' Guide to Pool Problems



Prevention is not only better than cure, it's also less expensive. So here we look mostly at problems that can be avoided and therefore how to save money, not to mention avoiding the loss of use. In rented properties, loss of use can also mean loss of revenue or refunds to paying guests...

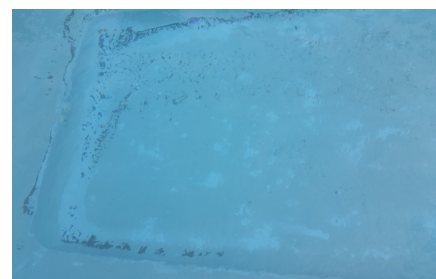
Let's start with lime-scale. You may think that kettles and boilers are about the only things affected by hard water, but pools suffer as well. A lime-scale build-up on the liner looks horrible, and gives the impression that the pool is filthy.

The photos on the right show a pool that has a considerable lime-scale problem. Whilst some of the dark patches are loose dirt, most are not. The photos were taken just a couple of weeks before the first paying guests were due to arrive.



The pool needed to be pumped almost dry, and acid sprayed onto the sides and floor. The spraying time is minimal and the result is almost instant - the real cost involved is in replacing the water and repeated visits to monitor progress with emptying/refilling. And of course, spraying acid is hazardous.

To prevent this problem occurring in the first place, use a lime-scale inhibitor when filling the pool. Calcium is nearly always present in water, and a level of 250 - 350 parts per million (ppm) is good. The hardness of water varies dramatically from one location to the next, so it is impossible to say how much to use - just follow the instructions on the pack. Somewhat bizarrely, lime-scale problems tend only to be apparent a year or two after the pool is filled with fresh water.



The photo on the right was taken just a day or two after the first photos. The pool is approximately ten years old, and is now restored to pristine condition.



The process is not long or complex, but can be expensive when repeated visits are needed.

Be aware that the addition of anti lime-scale products will affect the total alkalinity and pH.

Do not underestimate the importance of a weekly backwash and rinse. Even if the pool is not used much, it is still important – indeed, if it isn't used, no one will bother to remove leaves and insects from the surface so the filter will probably block more frequently, not less.

Checking the skimmer(s) - By far the most common problem encountered with pools is the tendency for the skimmers to block with leaves and pine needles. Keep plant-life around the pool to a minimum. *Pine needles in particular are highly acidic, and will drive down the pH relentlessly.*



Replacing the water that is pumped out during the backwash/rinse process also helps to maintain the correct cyanuric acid level. Only use tap water – not well-water. Tap water quality is guaranteed.

Maintaining the correct chlorine, pH and total alkalinity levels are crucial not only for the users' comfort but also for the well-being of the pool. Over chlorination will fade the liner and make it age prematurely, becoming brittle and prone to breaking particularly in corners where the liner is often not supported by the wall of the construction. Your liner should be good for ten years at least. pH and total alkalinity can cause premature wear on the pump if too acidic. It will also affect the sand in the filter, and so that may need to be replaced more frequently.

How frequently should the sand be replaced? Opinions vary. Some say every five years, some say 10 years. As long as you don't have a problem, it's probably best to leave it as long as possible. Replacing the sand is a time-consuming, laborious task as the only access to scoop out the old sand with a trowel is through the top. *Once the sand is replaced, the first action is to backwash and rinse to settle the sand in the filter and expel any that has landed in the wrong place.*



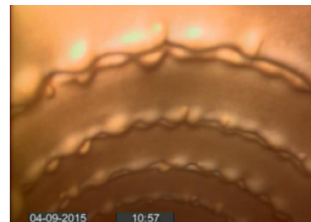
A high reading on the pressure gauge indicates a problem after the pump in the system. Maybe valves are (partially) closed. Possibly a blockage in a return pipe. Usually though, it simply indicates the need to backwash and rinse.



A low pressure reading indicates a poor supply of water to the pump. Check that valves are open and that the skimmers are not blocked.

The fault that probably strikes the most terror in a pool owner's heart is a leak. The cost of a new liner, or of digging up the terrace to repair pipework is high. Correct maintenance of the pool chemistry will minimise such risks, but if you suspect a leak, what should you do?

An [evaporation test](#) is easy and costs nothing. Simply mark the water level in the pool; nearly fill a bucket with pool water and mark the level. Place the bucket on the steps, and leave it for a couple of days. The level should drop in both the pool and the bucket by a roughly equal amount, and if it has, your water loss is evaporation. If the water in the bucket has fallen more than the pool, you either have a leaky bucket or a thirsty dog. If the pool level has dropped more than the bucket, you need to establish where the leak is. A [static test](#) is done by leaving the pump off for a day or two, and see if the level drops. Leave it until the level stops falling. Wherever the level is when it stops is usually the level at which the leak will be found*. Visually check the liner first, and if all is well, then the skimmer boxes or pipework are suspect. Small tears to the liner can be patched. Damage to pipework can be repaired by sleeving the pipes, not always easy but is usually expensive and a specialist company is needed. *It is not always necessary to dig up the terrace.*



** Sometimes the leak is lower than the water level would suggest. Remember that the leak depends on pressure to force the water out of the pool. When the pressure drops low enough, the leak can sometimes almost stop, even though the hole is still under water.*

If properly installed and maintained, your pool should be good for at least ten years without any dramas. After that, some components can start to fail, but these days a ten-year life expectancy for anything is pretty good.