



The Handyman France Idiots' Guide to Pool Terminology

It always helps when dealing with professionals or specialist shops if both parties are singing off the same hymn sheet, hence this guide to pool terminology. Where appropriate, the French words/terms are in parenthesis. But let's start with the only entry here which is not translated...

Loi n° 2003-9 du 3 janvier 2003 relative à la Sécurité des piscines is the law which sets out the **safety standards required*** to reduce the child fatalities from drowning in France. Approximately 20 children under five years of age die every year in France in drowning incidents. All outdoor in-ground pools are subject to these requirements. There are no exceptions. Your local mayor has no authority to set aside the requirements. The penalty is a fine (up to 45000€). Or a dead child in your pool. Or both. It's your choice. (* Those that are mentioned here are highlighted red. Not all safety systems are mentioned here.)

Above-ground pool (*piscine hors sol*). No explanation needed, just the translation. But be aware that if you partially bury the pool, or build up decking around all or part of the pool, then the pool ceases to be an above-ground pool for the purposes of the safety laws.

Alga, which is the singular of **algae** (*Algue*). Only five different algae bloom in swimming pools. All are easy to deal with, usually by **hyper-chlorination**. None of those five are harmful to human health, so the pool can still be used even if it's vivid green, or sometimes yellow. Most alga blooms are a result of poor filtration.

Backwash (*lavage*). As the name implies, by reversing the flow of water through the **sand filter**, contaminants are removed and pumped to waste. Normally, this should be done weekly, followed by a **rinse**.

Ball valve (*vanne à bille*). There are usually several of these in the pump room so that individual pipes can be isolated – for instance when using the vacuum cleaner, you can shut off the **skimmer(s)** and/or the **main drain**.

Chlorine (**free/total/combined**) (*chllore libre/total/combiné*). For explanations of these terms, please refer to the Idiots' Guide to Pool Chemistry.

Chlorine tablets (*chllore galets* or *chllore longue durée*). The most commonly used of all sanitation systems. Tablets should only be used in the **skimmers**.

Dog ramp (*rampe pour chien*). An add-on to an **in-ground pool** to ensure your doggy can leave the pool unaided. Aah, isn't that nice!

Hyper-chlorination (*hyperchloration*). Using the same chemicals as used for a **shock**, but much, much more, will rapidly deal with an alga bloom. However, be aware of the risk of long-term damage to the **liner** and pipework.

In-ground pool (*piscine enterrée*). No explanation needed, just the translation.

Leak (*fuite*). Leaks can occur anywhere and at any time. Remedies can be simple and inexpensive. But not always.

Liner, conveniently called the same in French. Used in around 70% of pools, it is a PVC membrane that is available in numerous colours and patterns – even green.

Main drain (*bonde de fond*). The thing that often looks like a big bath plug-hole at the deep end. Is primarily used for draining water from the pool, either completely or partially to below the skimmers.

Multivalve (*vanne 6 voies* or *multivoies*). This valve is always located on either the side or the top of the **sand filter** (*filtre à sable*) and is used to direct the water around the system.

pH, the same initials are used in French. It is the abbreviation for potential hydrogen – so now you know! The most crucial of all water properties, it is a measure of alkalinity or acidity. Pool water should be around 7.2 to 7.4, which is slightly alkaline and comfortable to human skin and eyes.

pH bounce (*rebond du pH*). Erratic behaviour of the **pH** readings, with test results going up and down like the proverbial yo-yo. The cause is usually low **total alkalinity**.

pH plus (+) and **pH minus (-)** (*pH plus* and *pH moins*). The technical names are sodium carbonate and sodium bisulphate respectively. But pH+ or pH- sounds much nicer. When the pH reading is too high, use pH-. If the reading is too low, use pH+. After adding chemicals, wait at least 3 hours before taking another reading to allow enough time for the water to have circulated sufficiently for an accurate reading to be possible.

Pool alarm (*alarme de piscine* or *détecteur de chute*). **One of the approved safety measures that are a legal requirement for in-ground pools.** A device which is usually fitted onto the terrace around the pool which detects sudden changes in the water level caused when someone jumps into or falls into the pool.

Pool heater (*pompe à chaleur*). Also known as a heat pump in English, it is essentially air conditioning technology. Not as expensive to run as you may think!

Pressure gauge (*manomètre*). Used to determine the water pressure in the sand filter.

Return nozzle or **blower** (*buse de refoulement*). Two or more of these are usually found at the shallow end where they return water to the pool after it has been filtered.

Rinse (*rinçage*). This procedure pumps water to waste after it has gone through the filter in the normal direction. Should be done after every **backwash**.

Safety cover (*bâche à barre*). **One of the approved safety measures that are a legal requirement for in-ground pools.** This type of cover is easily identified by the presence of aluminium poles.

Safety fence (*clôture de sécurité*). **One of the approved safety measures for in-ground pools**. Not all pools are suitable though, as although the requirements are simple, they are very strict. Do not for one moment think you can use a chain-link fence and an ordinary garden gate!

Saline system (*electrolyseur au sel*). A salt pool system. The electrolysis unit splits the sodium from the chloride allowing the chloride to sanitise the pool.

Sand filter (*filtre à sable*). That's the thing in the pump room that looks like a barrel with three pipes connected to the **multi-valve**.

Shock (*choc*). Increasing the free **chlorine** level rapidly, believe it or not, removes a strong smell of chlorine. The tablets (*pastilles*) are small and dissolve very quickly. The higher **chlorine** level reduces quite quickly as well because the shock treatment is not **stabilised**.

Skimmer, conveniently called the same in French. The primary means of taking water from the pool for filtration.

Stabiliser (*stabilisateur de chlore*). The technical term is cyanuric acid, or CYA. It prevents chlorine from being destroyed too quickly by sunlight. **Chlore choc** is not stabilised, but the larger **chlorine tablets** for normal use are stabilised.

Summer cover (*couverture été* or *bâche à bulles*). Essentially, these are sheets of bubble-wrap that float on the surface to retain heat. Note – they are not **safety covers**, and do not conform to any safety standard or requirement.

Total alkalinity (*l'alcalinité*). This measurement is important as it affects the ability of other chemicals to change or maintain a constant **pH** level. Low total alkalinity can result in **pH bounce**.

Vacuum point (*prise balai*). Usually located about half way along one side of the pool, it is where the vacuum pipe (*tuyau flottante*) connects to facilitate manual cleaning of the pool.

Waste pipe (*égout*). The pipe that carries waste water from the sand filter when backwashing/rinsing or pumping to waste.

Winter cover (*couverture d'hiver*). Normally blue, these covers are secured to the ground by bungees (*sandow*) or sometimes spring-loaded clips. They are regarded as being a safety cover when used during the winter months.

The above list of explanations of commonly used terms when dealing with pools should help you to understand what is being said or referred to when the pool is the main topic. Of course, not all words can be included. Explanations are of necessity brief.

But at least you can scribble a few words on a piece of paper when you visit your pool shop. And perhaps not appear quite such an idiot.

Mind you, it's never stopped me...