

Eight Easy Solutions for Problem Pools

by **Donald J. Lapa**

It would be nice if every pool water problem could be prevented. But even the most diligent adherence to routine maintenance programs can't eliminate every algae bloom, stain or odor. So we have products and procedures to kill algae, clear water and help keep water chemistry balanced. In-store testing stations, poolside trouble shooting methods and problem-solving products all play important roles in ongoing battle against water menaces.

Before any problem can be treated, the water chemistry must be checked. It is, therefore, imperative that the testing of the water is placed in the hands of an experienced person who could diagnose, solve and hopefully prevent pool water problems. We have prepared a guide to eight of the most common obstacles to pool-owner happiness.

1. CLOUDY WATER

The culprit is either water chemistry imbalance or insufficient filter operation. Upon further examination, one might find algae, high levels of total dissolved solids (TDS), body oils, insufficient sanitizer levels, high pH or hardness levels, channeling sand (torn or damaged grids) or poor water circulation due to debris in a skimmer, pump basket or elsewhere.

Solutions: Many clarifiers on the market remove particular matter when a properly operating filter just can't catch it. These products - chelating agents, flocculants or sequestering agents - generally coagulate particles for one of two purposes. They help the filter catch the larger clusters, or the clusters become heavy enough to fall to the bottom of the pool where they can easily be vacuumed.

One of the simplest ways to treat cloudiness is to drain about a foot of water and put fresh water in the pool. Shocking the pool also helps clear water by oxidizing organics such as algae and bacteria. When cloudiness is caused by algae blooms, there are other factors to consider, which are addressed later.

2. ALGAE

Floating green algae is the most common, followed by yellow or mustard algae and then by black algae. All forms of algae can eventually root in pool walls, but the more common types generally don't do so as quickly - or as stubbornly - as black algae. Algae blooms can usually be blamed on inadequate sanitization and too often greet pool owners at the beginning of the season.

Solutions: Different types of algae can be treated with particular specialty products. Some remove essential nutrients from the water, thus starving the algae, and are called chlorine enhancers, not algacides. Chlorine also kills algae, therefore, chlorine shocks are usual algae remedies. Another difference among algae treatments is brushing. Some say algae should always be brushed to expose as many cells as possible. Still others say only black algae requires brushing, and then with a wire brush. Whatever brushing regimen and algae-control product you choose, it's important to make sure the product is well-circulated.

3. STAINS

Stains are either organic or metallic. Organic stains develop when leaves, for example, sit on the pool floor and transfer tannins to the surface. Metallic stains can occur when pH fluctuates. When pH drops, the corrosive water can attack a copper heat exchanger, drawing copper ions into the flow and then depositing the copper in another form as the pH comes back up.

Solutions: Identify what you're dealing with --- color can be a good indicator. Greenish-blue, blue or black indicate copper. Reddish or brown spots are usually iron - tan or purple point to manganese. Grays, however, can be a litany of things.

Most common are copper and iron. Low pH and high chlorine levels and copper are the conditions that lead to most stains. Once you've identified the culprit, the cure can probably be found in the right bottle.

There are two ways to approach a stain - gradually or aggressively. Some preventative products can be added weekly or biweekly as part of routine chemistry maintenance and can eventually remove existing stains. It may seem expensive, but it's less expensive than an acid wash. Aggressive approaches involve chemicals that are applied directly to the stain, or acid washes.

4. SCALE

The white, gray or brownish deposits known as scale are widely believed to result from high pH, alkalinity and/or calcium hardness levels that prevent minerals from staying in solution. The factors leading to scaling, when they're out of balance, are: pH above 7.8, alkalinity above 100-120 ppm and/or calcium hardness above 1,000 ppm(or lower, depending on the sanitizer used).

Solutions: As complicated as scale's origins may seem, removing it can be as simple as using a scale-removal product and probably brushing the surface.

5. EYE/SKIN IRRITATIONS

This condition is usually caused by insufficient sanitizer levels or pH outside of recommended ranges, although swimmers often think there's too much chlorine in the pool.

Solutions: First, test to see what's out of whack - it could be pH, alkalinity, sanitizer levels, some other factor or any combination of these. Then adjust the water chemistry balance and shock the pool to convert unwanted, irritating chloramines back into the accepted form of chlorine. It is generally accepted in the pool industry that chlorine is most effective at pH levels between 7.2 and 7.8. After shocking the pool, keep swimmers out until the chlorine residual drops below 3 ppm.

6. ODOR

Like eye and skin irritations, the dominant theory behind chlorine odor is that without enough chlorine products in the pool, chlorines - the smelly form of chlorine - accumulate and gas off.

Solutions: Balance the water with appropriate pH and/or alkalinity adjusting products. Then shock the pool to recalibrate the active and inactive forms of chlorine. Don't just pour in deodorizers - may be because the pH is low and it's driving chlorine off the water.

7. DISCOLORED WATER

This category of pool water problems is perhaps the most mysterious, so it yields some good stories. Manganese can appear brown or black. Copper and iron may give the water a greenish cast, although brown hues have also been identified as iron. Algae blooms and cloudiness, discussed earlier, can also be the root of discolored water.

Solutions: There are two families of products that help remove metal from pool water. Sequestrates tie up metals so they can't come out of solution. Some consider this a temporary solution because metals aren't removed from the pool system. Instead, they recommend flocculants, which collect unwanted particles into clusters that can then be filtered or vacuumed.

8. SCUM

A combination of soaps and oils from skin, detergents from swimsuits, cosmetics and lotions, and even gritty air pollution can accumulate on the water surface - or in skimmers, filters, etc. - and cause general unpleasantness. Scum is rarely harmful, however.

Solutions: Tile cleaners will remove scum lines. Also, most enzyme products break down scum effectively. Besides simply keeping the pool free from scum-causing culprits, try one of the numerous scum-absorbing products on the market.

Donald J. Lapa is the owner of Mister Poolman and has been in business for over 20 years. The service areas extend from Glendale to Santa Monica, L.A. Airport to the south and the entire San Fernando Valley. For questions, please feel free to call him directly at (310) 836-4528 or (818) 981-2674. Visit Mister Poolman website at www.mister-poolman.com