

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR...

PAUL PENNINGTON, founding member of The Pool Safety Consortium, a nonprofit group in Washington, D.C., which is raising awareness of a new federal pool safety law.



» What will the new law require of community association pools? The Virginia Graeme Baker Public Pool and Safety Act was signed into law last year to prevent suction entrapment injuries and deaths. Existing public pools and spas must retrofit with anti-entrapment drain covers by Dec. 20.

» What prompted this new law? Over the past decade, there have been 10 reported deaths and 63 injuries caused by suction entrapment, and these may be underestimated. I am aware of six entrapment accidents in just the last few months. Suction entrapment occurs when part of a swimmer's body, clothing or hair becomes suctioned to the drain. The suction force caused by the powerful water circulation system can be incredible—about 500 pounds of force for a standard pump. It is nearly impossible for an adult to free an entrapped swimmer.

» What new equipment will it require? Specifically, public pools, wading pools, spas and hot tubs must be equipped with approved safety drain covers. Associations should verify that their drain covers comply with the new standards. Compliant drain covers have only been available for the past three months and noncompliant ones are still being sold. Also, each pool or spa with a single main drain—other than an unblockable drain at least 18 by 23 inches—must have at least one of the following protective devices: a safety vacuum release, a suction-limiting vent, gravity drainage, automatic pump shut-off or drain disablement.

» How much will it cost? The cost will vary depending upon the pool and which system is utilized, but generally it can be done at a very reasonable cost. Approved drain covers can cost from \$30 to \$50, and a safety vacuum release can be installed in less than an hour for about \$800.

» Where can association boards get more information? View the Consumer Product Safety Commission's guidelines at www.cpsc.gov/phth/vgpsa.pdf. For more information, visit The Pool Safety Consortium's website at www.poolsafetyconsortium.org.

