



RRWA Environmental Column – May 2010: Environmentally Sound Pool and Hot Tub Draining

When the hot days of summer arrive, for many of us there is nothing better than taking a dip in our backyard swimming pools. As the weather warms, many of us are turning our attention to swimming pool and hot tub repairs. Sometimes those repairs require draining some or all of the water stored in a pool or hot tub.

Why is pool and hot tub water harmful to creeks and the Russian River?

The pool and hot tub water can be harmful to fish and other organisms that live in our streams. Disinfectants such as chlorine are toxic to aquatic life. Diatomaceous earth, cellulose fiber and sand in filter back wash can suffocate fish eggs and young fish. Water from salt water pools can also harm fish and other organisms.

When draining a pool or hot tub or any other feature with chlorinated or otherwise disinfected water, the water should *not* be drained to the storm drain. The water that goes into the storm drain systems in Sonoma and Mendocino counties is not treated before it flows into our waterways. Whatever goes into the storm drain in front of your home or business goes straight into creeks and the Russian River.

What's the best way to drain my pool or hot tub?

Drain your pool or hot tub water into the sanitary sewer rather than the storm drain. Be sure to contact your local sewer or wastewater agency for any permits or special regulations before you drain your pool or hot tub. You can locate the sewer cleanout for your property and drain the water into that cleanout or drain it into a wash basin or other fixture on your property that is connected to the sewer system. You may need a sump pump to pump the water from the pool into the sewer inlet. If you do, do not use a pump that pumps more than 20 gallons per minute to avoid overflows. Your local hardware store may have this type of pump. If you pump into a sewer cleanout, be sure to replace the sewer cleanout cover when you are done. You can also ask your pool maintenance company if they will provide this service to you.

If the water in the pool or hot tub is still of "swimmable" quality, another option to consider is renting a temporary storage container or tank." Pump the pool or hot tub water into the temporary storage container, make the repairs, and then pump the water back into the pool or hot tub. This option conserves water and eliminates any storm water issues.

Before you drain...

Before you drain your pool or hot tub, do not add any chemicals for two weeks prior to draining it. You should also have a pool maintenance professional test the water before draining. The chlorine concentration should be less than 0.5 parts per million and the copper level should be less than 0.2 parts per million before you drain the water to the sanitary sewer system.

For further information and assistance, contact your local pool and hot tub maintenance company or your local public works department.

By properly draining our pools and hot tubs, we can help protect the fragile life in the Russian River and throughout our watershed.

This article was authored by Cristina Goulart of Winzler & Kelly for the Town of Windsor on behalf of the Russian River Watershed Association. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.