

**Frequently Asked Questions
About the
Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act
and
Connecticut's Public Pools**

Q: What is the new Federal Public Pool and Spa Safety Act?

A: In December 2007, President Bush signed into law the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool & Spa Safety Act. This new law requires safety improvements for public pools and spas, specifically in the area of entrapment prevention.

Q: When did the law go into affect?

A: December 19, 2008. Year round public pools and spas must comply by December 19, 2008; seasonal public pools and spas must comply before they re-open.

Q: What are the basic requirements of this law?

A: The Act requires:

1. Every public pool and spa, both new and existing, must change out the existing grates/covers on their main drains and replace them with ones that meet the requirements of the new ASME/ANSI A112.19.8-2007 Standard.
2. Every public pool and spa, both new and existing, with a single main drain, other than an unblockable size drain, or with multiple main drains that are less than 3 feet apart, measured center on center, must have or install a second anti-entrapment devices such as:
 - Safety Vacuum Release System (SVRS) conforming to ASME/ANSI A112.19.17 Standard
 - Suction-Limiting Vent System with a tamper-resistant atmospheric opening
 - Gravity Drainage System (surge tank, balance tank, balance line)
 - Automatic Pump Shut-Off System
3. No grates/covers can be manufactured, distributed, or entered into commerce in the United States that do not conform to the new federal standard.

Q: What is a main drain?

A: The federal Act defines a main drain as a “submersible suction outlet typically located at the bottom of a pool or spa to conduct water to a circulating pump”.

Q: Then is a skimmer equalizer line by definition a main drain?

A: Yes. The federal Act is requiring that these lines also be correctly covered or plugged.

Q: Does the hydrotherapy system on a public spa also need to comply with the federal Act?

A: Yes. The suction outlets for the hydrotherapy system (jet system) are also required to comply fully with the federal Act.

Q: What is an unblockable size drain?

A: A drain the size or shape that a human body cannot cover. Typically a drain in size larger than 18" x 23" is considered unblockable.

Q: Why if the drain is unblockable does the grate/cover need to be changed?

A: The federal law addresses all kinds of entrapment, not just body entrapment. The new standards address hair, limb, body as well as potential mechanical (jewelry) entrapment.

Q: Who is the responsible organization for enforcement of this federal law?

A: The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is the authorized federal enforcement agency. The CPSC under an Improvement Act authorizes State Attorney Generals the power to enforce this Act. In addition the Connecticut Public Health Code, Section 19-13-B33b(g) states that the Director of Health, if there exists a condition that constitutes a "safety hazard", "may order such a public pool (or spa) closed until the correction is made". Not complying with this Act would justify an order.

Q: What does this mean for Public Pools and Spas in CT?

A: The Department of Public Health (DPH) issued a Circular Letter, Letter #2008-91, on December 1, 2008, which provides guidance on the new federal Act for all public pools and spas in CT. The Circular Letter can be found on the DPH web page by going to www.dph.ct.gov, click on "Environmental Health", and then click on "Public Swimming Pools"

Q: Who can do the work on the public pools and spas?

A: A licensed professional (Consumer Protection License SP-1 for contractors and SP-2 for journeymen/workers) should do all the work necessary for compliance to ensure that correct flows are maintained across the drain and that the correct connection of the main drain cover to the sump is achieved.

Q: Where can I find an approved grate/cover or SVRS?

A: The CPSC is maintaining a list of approved products. This list can be found at: www.cpsc.gov/whatsnew.html#pool. Or one can check with the manufacturer of the product.

Q: Are there grates/covers available for older public pools and spas?

A: There are many grates/covers on the market now that are federally approved and can be used now. The grate/cover installed need to be rated for the design flow of the recirculation and hydrotherapy system in place at 1.5 feet per second (fps) velocity.

Q: What if there is no approved grate/cover available on the market?

A: The CPSC is allowing a licensed professional engineer to assess and test an existing field fabricated grate/cover for compliance to the ANSI Standards. The professional engineer would then need to issue a certificate of conformity, to show compliance.

Q: What is the approval process for only a grate/cover replacement?

A: The contractor or owner should submit a statement to the Local Health Department indicating that they have replaced the grate/cover with ones that are in compliance with the ASME/ANSI A112.19.8 2007 Standard, and any installed secondary anti-entrapment that was needed.

Q: What is the approval process if modifications to the pool/spa are more extensive than a simply replacing the grate/cover?

A: Where the simple replacement of a new drain grate/cover cannot be achieved, and reconfiguration of the sump or piping is necessary, the pool owner should submit plans to the DPH for review.

Q: Does the sump need to be modified?

A: If a replacement grate/cover does not sit securely or properly on an existing sump, then the sump may also need to be changed. The pool contractor doing the work should ensure that the replacement grate/cover is a correct fit to the existing conditions.

In some situations, a field-constructed sump, or older sump, might need extensive work to meet the new ANSI standards.

Q: Can the main drain simply be disabled to comply with the federal Act?

A: No. The CT DPH Public Swimming Pool Design Guide, under which all public pools and spas are approved, requires bottom main drains.

Q: If an existing pool has only one main drain does a second main drain need to be installed?

A: No. The federal Act, nor the DPH, requires that existing public pools or spas install a second main drain to comply with the Act. However, the DPH is pursuing that all wading pools, both new and existing, be equipped with at least two main drains.

Q: If a pool has two main drains, more than 3 feet apart, does it need to install a SVRS or other form of secondary anti-entrapment device?

A: No.

Q: What is a safety vacuum release system (SVRS)?

A: A SVRS is a device that is capable of providing vacuum release at a suction outlet that has been blocked.

Q: Where is a SVRS installed?

A: The SVRS is installed on the piping from the main drain(s) prior to the pump.

Q: What is a gravity system?

A: Gravity drainage is a circulation system where water flowing from a pool or spa does not connect directly to the pump. The water drains into a surge tank or balance tank open to the atmosphere from which the pump in turns pulls water from for circulation back into the pool. Gravity drain pools typically are a gutter style pool.

Q: What is a suction-limiting vent system?

A: A pipe vented to the atmosphere that connects to the suction pipe between the pool and the pump. When a high vacuum event occurs, air from the vent pipe replaces the water in the suction pipe thereby breaking the suction at the submerged outlet. A tamper resistant cover must protect the vent opening.

Q: What is an automatic pump shut-off?

A: A device or system that shuts off the pump/motor when it senses a high vacuum occurrence.

Q: What if the main drain cover is missing or broken?

A: As in the past, any public pool that is missing a main drain cover or has a broken main drain cover should be ordered closed until a repair is made. These pools present a high safety hazard and should be closed immediately under PHC Section 19-13-B33b(g).

Q: Are there any public pools that do not need to comply with the federal Act?

A: Splash pads/Spray parks, with no standing water, by definition are exempted from the Act, as they do not have “submerged” suction outlets. They do not need to make any changes to their main drains and can remain open and continue to operate as usual.

Q: Can an exemption or extension to the federal Act be issued by the DPH?

A: No, this is a federal Act.

Q: Should the owner of a public pool or spa that is not in compliance with the federal Act voluntarily close?

A: The federal Act does not specifically direct a non-compliant public pool or spa to close. However the pool or spa owner may choose to close down their pools or spa for liability reasons since it is not in compliance with the federal Act. The owner should also check with their insurance agent to see if insurance coverage is still provided.

Q: Where can I find more information on the federal Act?

A: The federal law can be found at: www.cpsc.gov.

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