

SAN MATEO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION
2000 Alameda de las Pulgas, Suite 100
San Mateo, CA 94403

To: Public Pool Operators/Owners

Subject: Floating Pool/Spa Covers

San Mateo County Ordinance Code, Section 4160.5, requires that all new swimming pool and spas be covered. Section 4160.5 also encourages covers to be installed for existing pools. Pool covers are used to conserve water as well as reduce energy costs.

Although there are several types of pool covers on the market, most pool operators choose a floating type cover. These covers provide substantial energy and water savings at a reasonable cost. While other types of covers provide similar savings their costs are significantly higher.

Floating pool covers are, however, considered by most pool safety experts to be very dangerous. For the reason the San Mateo County Health Department does not recommend the use of floating covers for public pools or spas. Floating covers are opaque or translucent thus making it impossible to clearly see what is underneath them. Secondly, when placed upon the water the covers give the appearance that it can be walked on; especially to the eyes of a small child. Because they are not securely attached they will collapse under the weight of a child and possibly result in entrapment. There have been documented cases of children being trapped and hidden from view under such covers resulting in brain damage or death. In addition, pool bathers have been known to only remove part of a floating cover and swim in half-covered pool. Bathers can become disoriented swim under the cover and become trapped underneath.

For these reasons, this Department recommends that floating pool covers on public pools should only be used when all of the following conditions exist.

1. The pool is segregated from all dwelling units by a separate fence or enclosure. Floating pool covers shall not be used on courtyard pools or situations, where there is no fence between the living units and the pool.
2. The pools should be under the supervision of management personnel or other responsible person(s) who has sole access to the pool area when it is not open for use. The pool area should be locked to prevent any usage of the pool when the cover is placed on the pool water. The pool may not be reopened, for use, until the responsible person(s) remove the pool cover and properly stores it.
3. The pool cover, when not in use, should be completely removed, rolled up and stored at least four feet from the pool. In the case of spa pools, the cover should be physically removed from the premises to prevent bathers from re-covering the spa pool.

For more information on this subject, contact the San Mateo County Office of Environmental Health at (650) 372-6200.