

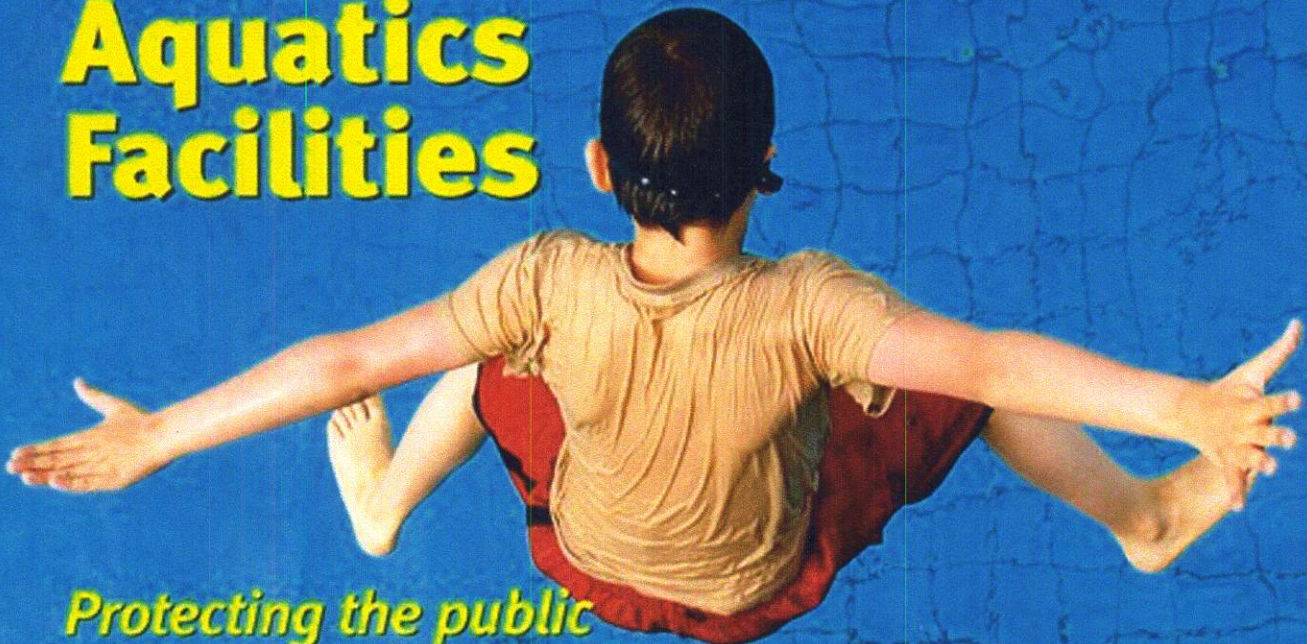
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2008
AQUATICS ISSUE

Safeguarding Aquatics Facilities



*Protecting the public
and future projects*

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› BY PAUL PENNINGTON

Life-Saving Incentives

The Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act

With the December 19 signing of the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act of 2007, President Bush approved incentives for states to adopt comprehensive pool safety laws that will protect children from life-threatening injuries and death from pool and spa drains. Included as part of a comprehensive energy bill (H.R. 6), the legislation was named for Graeme Baker, the granddaughter of former Secretary of State James A. Baker III. Graeme died at the age of seven in a tragic suction entrapment incident when a spa drain's powerful suction trapped her underwater.

While drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related deaths among children up to age 14, drain entrapment—like the incident that took the life of Graeme—also poses significant dangers to both children and adults who utilize swimming pools, spas and wading pools.

Entrapment occurs when part of a swimmer's body, clothing or hair becomes suctioned to a drain due to the pool's or spa's powerful water circulation system. Once a swimmer is entrapped, the force of the pool's suction can be incredible—about 500 pounds of force for an 8-inch main drain operating on a standard pump. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for an adult to free an entrapped swimmer from these forces, and all too often serious permanent injury or death occurs.

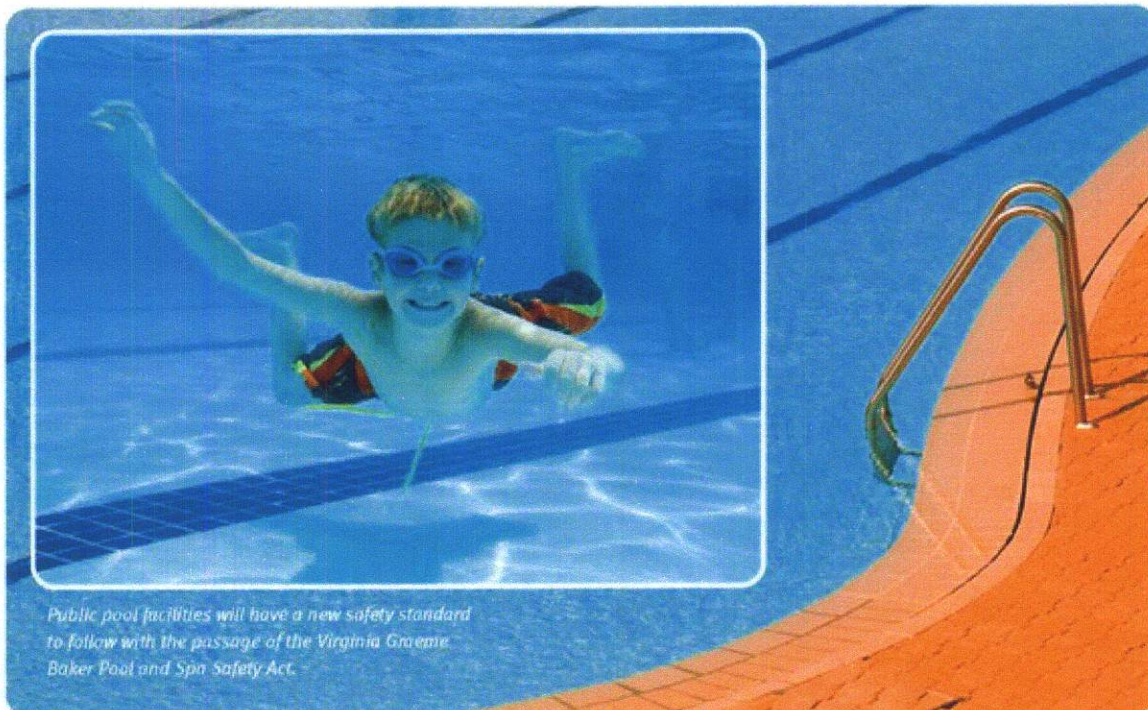
There are five types of entrapment:

1. Body entrapment—a section of the torso becomes entrapped
2. Limb entrapment—an arm or leg is pulled into an open drain pipe
3. Hair entrapment or entanglement—hair is pulled into and wrapped around the grate of the drain cover

4. Mechanical entrapment—jewelry or part of the swimmer's clothing becomes caught in the drain or drain grate

5. Evisceration—the swimmer's buttocks come into contact with the pool suction outlet and the person is disemboweled within seconds.

In an effort to prevent future suction entrapment and other drowning incidents, the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act will provide grants to states that pass a comprehensive swimming pool and spa safety law. If awarded, the bill would require states to use these funds to hire and train personnel for the proper enforcement of the state law. Additionally, states would be required to use the grant money to educate pool owners and operators, pool construction and installation companies, pool service



Public pool facilities will have a new safety standard to follow with the passage of the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act.

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Life-Saving Incentives

companies and the public about the state law and drowning-prevention practices—all in an effort to promote a higher awareness of pool and spa safety.

While this state incentive/education program is a widely known benefit of the bill, very few industry professionals realize the full magnitude the new legislation will have on the swimming pool industry as a whole. In fact, the new law has put into effect a full-scale federal swimming pool and spa safety standard issued by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) on all public pools that will be enforced in 12 months.

Defining A "Public" Pool Or Spa

Under the new legislation, a public pool or spa is either generally open to the public, whether for a fee or free of charge, or is open exclusively to the following groups:

- Members of an organization and their guests
- Residents of a multi-unit apartment building, apartment complex, residential real estate development or other

multi-family residential area (other than a municipality, township or other local government jurisdiction)

- Patrons of a hotel or other public accommodations facility
- Members of the armed forces and their dependents or employees of any department or agency and their dependents.

Compliance With The Consumer Product Safety Rule (Sec. 1404)

By December 2008, each public pool and spa in the country must be equipped with anti-entrapment devices or systems that comply with the ASME/ANSI performance standard. Additionally, each pool or spa with a single main drain—other than an unblockable drain—must be equipped with at least one or more of the following layers of protection to prevent entrapment by pool or spa drains:

- Safety vacuum release system (SVRS)—An SVRS must cease operation of the pump, reverse the circulation flow, or provide a vacuum release at a suction



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Safety vacuum release system (SVRS)

outlet when a blockage is detected. It also must have been tested by an independent third party and found to conform to the mechanical engineering and national ASME/ANSI standard 112.19.17 or ASTM standard F2387

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- Suction-limiting vent system—A suction-limiting vent system with a tamper-resistant atmospheric opening
- Gravity drainage system—A gravity drainage system that utilizes a collector tank
- Automatic pump shut-off system—An automatic pump shut-off system senses vacuum at the main drain itself and shuts off water flow at the main drain before vacuum at the main drain reaches dangerous levels
- Drain disablement—A device or system that disables the drain of a pool or spa
- Other systems—Any other system determined by the CPSC to be equally effective as, or better than, the systems described previously.


Personal Options

All of the options listed above are effective layers of protection against suction entrapment. However, the SVRS remains the most economical option to bring existing public pools and spas up to code. This is because the SVRS is easily installed into the existing suction line from the main drain at the pool pump or the electrical line at the pool pump—both typically in as little as 30 minutes.

Available for several years, SVRS technology serves as a fail-safe when other methods of protection, such as dual drains and anti-entrapment drain covers, fail—all of which have been shown to be defeatable. The CPSC has even strongly recommended the SVRS in its *Guidelines for Entrapment Hazards*. It especially emphasizes the importance of the SVRS in wading pools to aid in the prevention of evisceration. Additionally, Safe Kids Worldwide highly endorses the use of an SVRS as the “last layer of protection” against suction entrapment in pools and spas.

SVRSs are available through three manufacturers throughout the United States: Vac-Alert Industries, Stingl-Products and Fail-Safe, LLC. **PRB**

Paul Pennington is a founding member of the Pool & Spa Safety Consortium, a Kentucky non-profit - formerly based in Washington D.C.—now temporarily located in Santa Rosa, Calif. Paul is also president of Vac-Alert Industries, a Fort Pierce, Fla.-based manufacturer of SVRS devices. He can be reached at paul@vac-alert.com.



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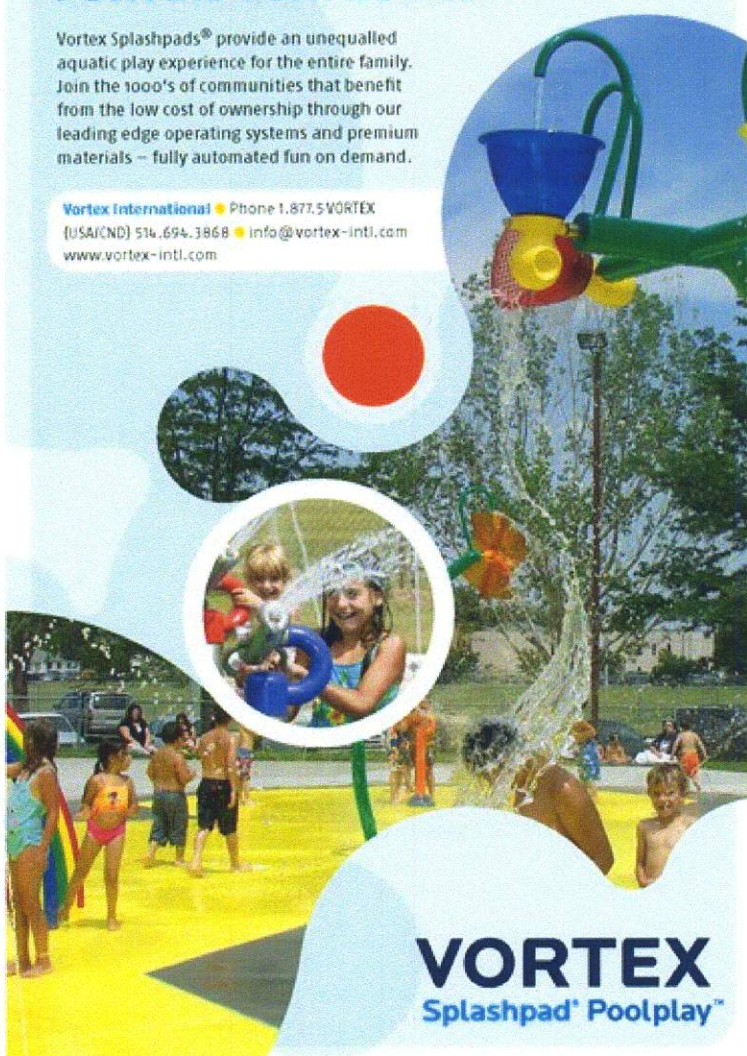
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