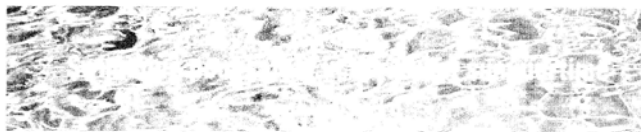


Waterwise



By Patty Khuly, DVM

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS a swimming pool, your dog is likely to take an interest in it. Though swimming may well be one of the healthiest and most entertaining exercises a canine can indulge in, it's not without its hazards. Thus, responsible dog guardians do well to note that not all dogs take gracefully to the water, and geriatric and epileptic dogs need special attention while poolside.

Take it from me—I know from personal experience that pools can be as dangerous as they are fun. Apart from the many near-drowning cases I've attended as a veterinarian, I've also experienced the tragedy of losing my own dog to a pool. Marcel was my first French Bulldog; this little guy always observed pool rules, instinctively, it seemed. One night, while we were visiting a friend, he became confused by the pool's old-style tiled surface and fell in. I wasn't able to resuscitate him.

Every year since, I've made a special point to write a pool safety article in Marcel's honor. This year's is practical—a review of several products currently marketed for home-pool pet safety. Some I've used personally with my own two Frenchies, and others I've sourced from client testimonials and a pile of pet catalogs.

Before I get started on the products, however, let me put in a plug for training dogs to swim, since not all of them know how. Even my Frenchies have benefited from these treat-spiked sessions. And, if it turns out that they despise the experience, they'll at least stay away from the water. Talk to a trainer for tips and private lessons.

Let's begin with the basic line of protection: a fence. There are times when our vigilance slips or our attention wanders,

and for those times, above-ground fences are the ideal solution (they're also required by law in most states). They may not provide the wide-open view you crave for your pool, but they're your safest bet, nonetheless. They run between \$400 and \$4,000, depending on your pool's size and your choice of fencing materials. Once your pool is fenced, the following products will help keep your pup safe at poolside.

- **PoolEye Invisible Pool Fence:** It's like an invisible fence but without the zap. Using LED technology, it detects motion between four above-ground poles and rings at a base station when a line of light is broken. At \$699, it's a stretch. Especially when products like Safety Turtle exist.

pooleye.com

- **Safety Turtle:** I love this product for its super-cute styling and ease of use. With Safety Turtle, I can read the paper in peace every morning while my two guys scamper unattended in the back yard. First marketed for children, this collar-attached device links to a base station that sets off an alarm when it hits water. It works! It even rings when they drink sloppily. Of course, it requires you to be at home and in hearing distance so you can respond immediately. It costs \$99, and it's worth every penny.

safetyturtle.com

- **Doggy life vests:** "Doesn't she look cute!" That's what you'll hear from your guests as they mill around the pool at your weekend barbecue. Sure, everyone's there, but no one's necessarily paying attention to the dog's every move. And that's how it happens. A vest does dou-

ble duty: It dresses her up and allows you to pay more attention to your guests. But never rely on it in unsupervised situations, and always try her out with it in the water—does she float head up, or does it dunk her head right in the drink? Find out in advance! These run between \$20 and \$50.

- **Pool Patrol and Pool Guard Pool Alarm:** Retailing at \$199 and \$179, respectively, these two water-displacement sensors will sound the alarm when something bigger than 15 pounds hits the water. But I'm not sure I'd trust it for any dog under 30 pounds.

poolpatrol.com

poolguard.com

- **Skamper-Ramp:** This product is great for experienced but aging canine swimmers. My mom's Parson's Terrier/Dingo mix had to be trained to use it (and he's a pretty bright pup), so don't expect to toss it in and walk away. It's also not made for dogs who are blind (or who have little bulldog legs), but for \$49, it's a great safety add-on for strong swimmers who may be losing their edge.

skamper-ramp.com

- **PoolPup Dog Pool Steps:** A competitor to the Skamper-Ramp, but at \$270, priced considerably higher.

poolpup.com

And finally, just say no to pool nets and covers, unless they can entirely support your dog's weight above the water line and won't leave her stranded until you get home.

Dr. Patty Khuly practices in Miami, Fla., and blogs at dolittler.com.