

POOLS AND PETS

PROTECTING DOGS AND CATS IN THE BACKYARD — BY BOB LYONS

Though largely unreported, accidental drowning of a pet in the family pool is common. “Both the numbers and the circumstances of the pet drowning stories I’ve been getting over 10 years leave me in no doubt about this,” says Bob Lyons, president of Terrapin Communications Inc., and inventor of the Safety Turtle pool alarm. “With a growing pet population – there are roughly 60 million dogs and 67 million cats in North America – and approximately 450,000 new pools per year, accidental pet drowning will continue to rise unless something changes. Roughly 41 per cent of pool owners have at least one pet – so action is long overdue.”

Although most healthy dogs (some breeds excepted, due to density) and cats have an innate ability to swim short distances, escape from a pool may be a life and death struggle. Barking is often difficult once the pet is in the water.

The untrained animal instinctively heads for the closest edge of the pool and tries to claw its way out. Clawing on concrete breaks nails, worsening panic. Water is ingested and breathing laboured. The animal is exhausted within minutes.

Very young, very old, and handicapped animals are most at risk of accidentally falling in a pool. A healthy animal who has escaped a close call won’t go near the pool, but this is rather cruel training.

While animals can be progressively trained to head for steps at the shallow end, if they exist, the steps may be too high for a smaller animal. Steps below the water line are invisible, so an untrained animal will never recognize them as an exit, particularly in an emergency.

Vinyl-liner pools offer no grip to the animal, and often include only a vertical ladder, which is nearly impossible for most pets to climb or cling to. Most vinyl-liner pool builders have the experience of repairing foot-long holes through pool liners at the waterline caused by a front paw of the owner’s dog.

“When the solar cover is on a pool, it is one of the most dangerous times for



pets, as they either fall on the cover, or try to walk on it, and go under and can’t get back up,” said Gae Horrigan, dog and swimming pool owner from LaMarque, Texas. “We know first hand the heartbreak people experience when they lose a pet to drowning. It’s like losing your child. Today, having the Safety Turtle is our way of trying to make sure this will never happen again to our beloved Westies, Duke and Tammy.”

If you swim (or contemplate swimming) in the pool with your pet, and the pet gets out unassisted, drowning prevention is not likely a concern. But be aware that swimming pool chemicals, notably chlorine, are much more harmful to pets (and infants) who may ingest them.




A salt chlorinator or ozonator is an appealing remedy, but don’t forget to shock the pool after you are finished for the day.

ABOUT SAFETY TURTLE FOR PETS

The Safety Turtle system for pets consists of a small, colour-coded turtle-shaped sensor that attaches to the pet’s collar, and a base station. When the pet falls

or ventures into the water, an ear piercing alarm is instantly sounded at the house (or boat) from the base station – allowing the owner to immediately respond to the distressed animal. One base station works with any number of pets having the same colour turtle sensor. Rain or ground moisture doesn’t set off the alarm.

IF YOU ARE A PET OWNER WITH A POOL, ASK YOURSELF:

-  Is escape from the pool possible for my pet?
-  Can my pet swim?
-  Is my pet trained to escape?

If the answer to any of the above questions is ‘no’, then rescue of the animal within two to five minutes may be life critical.