

Questions Arise About Salt Chlorine Generators

By Rebecca Robledo As sales of salt chlorine generators continue to grow exponentially, some builders report problems with stone copings on these pools and suspect that the salt is causing them to degrade.

Meanwhile, manufacturers of salt systems are meeting with builders and researching the issue.

Pool construction firms in Texas seem particularly vulnerable to this deterioration of the stone. They see it happening mostly on softer types of rock such as limestone.

But builders outside of Texas are witnessing the condition as well.

Buzz Ghiz, president of Paddock Pool Construction Co., a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based *Pool & Spa News* Top Builder, said that his company noticed flaking on coping, decks and even rock waterfalls. "We found over the past three to five years that we're having warranty issues on items such as decking, rock waterfalls and some equipment," he said. "But most of the time, the



PHOTO BY HENRY OLIVAS

problem is outside of the pool. We tracked it back to [the fact that] all these pools have salt chlorinators."

While he doesn't offer an exact figure, he said his company has had to pay to repair the problems, including the replacement of coping and, in a few cases, even entire decks.

Builders see the issue happening in areas of the pool that are repeatedly exposed to wet and dry conditions. Materials that remain continually submerged are problem-free, they said. The most damage occurs in places that receive splash-out from the pool or deck jets, or waterfeatures that run

occasionally, according to Guy Wood, owner of Westside Pools & Service Inc. in Fort Worth, Texas. He said that in some cases, the problem is found in as little as a few weeks.

"The best thing I could tell is that the water penetrates into the stone and then somehow expands and gives you a look similar to a freeze/thaw, like a spalling situation, where the stone just shatters on the top," Wood said.

Some builders theorize that when water splashes out of a pool, it then evaporates, leaving salt behind. As that salt builds up, it can damage certain types of rock.

Manufacturers of salt chlorine generators are fielding the questions. A group of seven firms met at the International Pool & Spa Expo to discuss the problem, said David Nibler, vice president of marketing and business development at Jandy in Petaluma, Calif. Nibler added that most feedback has come from northern Texas.

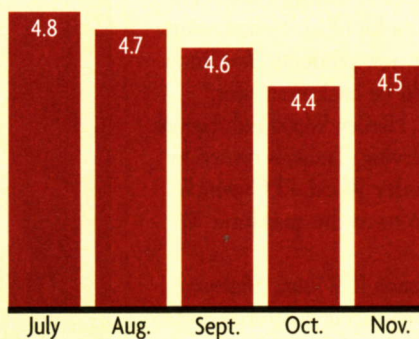
The group of manufacturers plans to spend the next few months compiling information from existing studies. They will also seek data from the pool industry in Australia, where salt chlorine generators have been popular for more than two decades. In addition, the manufacturers hope to fund independent research.

"It's a complex issue," Nibler said. "You have geographical, environmental

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Jobless Rate Edges Up

The jobless rate climbed from 4.4 percent in October to 4.5 percent in November. Nevertheless, nonfarm payroll employment grew by 132,000, with gains in professional and business services. The unemployment rates for major working groups in November were as follows: Caucasians, 3.9 percent; Hispanics or Latinos, 4.9 percent; African-Americans, 8.6 percent; and Asians, 3.2 percent, not seasonally adjusted.



SOURCE: U.S. LABOR DEPARTMENT

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conditions, source water, certainly the salt from chlorine generators as well as other pool chemicals, then regional differences in the materials being used in coping, and even pool finishes.”

Another manufacturer, Goldline Controls, held a meeting with five builders to discuss what they'd been finding. “This is just as new for us as it is

for the [builders],” said Stuart Baker, vice president/general manager of the North Kingstown, R.I.-based firm. “I think it's way too early to start making determinations on what the issue is yet. But it's not something that we take lightly.”

Goldline also has approached the National Sanitation Foundation about conducting research.

As of now, Baker recommends that builders who aren't sealing their stone coping begin doing so. “A couple of the builders at our meeting said they started using sealants,” he said. “It was too early to say if it eliminated the issue, but at the minimum, it slowed down the activity and problems.”

Builders are considering how to move forward. Currently, Wood explains to his clients what he's seen and tells them that they'll need to reseal the stone about every three months. He's also drafting a letter that will discuss the problem in detail.



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Ghiz has decided not to promote the product. If a customer requests a salt chlorine generator, they have to sign a disclaimer, he said.

Another builder, Bob Anderson, owner of Custom Design Pools in Friendswood, Texas, uses quartzite, a harder stone that looks like flagstone. He is also looking for sealers that will last longer than the six to eight months that he normally sees.

Many builders feel torn: Sales of salt chlorine generators have skyrocketed over the past few years, and consumers frequently ask for the product on their pools.

“Salt-chlorinated water is probably the best to swim in,” Anderson said. “You can go in and open your eyes.” ■

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