
“The Salty Solution”

“It almost seems too good to be true: Add a small amount (about 1/3 of what's in a teardrop) of table salt to pool or spa water, run that water past an electrolytic cell and, presto, you get chlorine and a sanitized pool, no muss, no fuss. Here's a look at how chlorine generators magically deliver the goods for customers - and their technicians.

The search for alternative methods of sanitizing pool and spa water has ranged far and wide for a great many manufacturers and service technicians. Ironically, it has also carried some of them right back to the substance for which the alternative has been sought: chlorine.

The distinction here, say those who advocate the use of chlorine generators, is that the chlorine used to sanitize the water by these systems is produced on the spot out of moderately salty pool or spa water. As such, they say, it qualifies as an "alternative" to conventional methods.

Granting that distinction, pools rigged with chlorine generators are in fact chlorinated. Even so, they've caught on with many builders, technicians and consumers, and largely because they do their work without granules, tablets, sticks, bottles, cylinders, feeders or any of the other paraphernalia that come with the usual forms of chlorination.

Developed Down Under

Chlorine-generating systems have become the sanitizing method of choice for pools and spas in the land Down Under. Indeed, more than 80 percent of all Australian pools and spas are maintained in this way.

These systems have been much slower to catch on in the United States, but their proponents cling to the hope that U.S. customers -- and a huge population of U.S. Pools & Spas -- will someday embrace the technology with the same fervor as their Australian counterparts.

To accomplish this transformation, table salt is added directly to the pool or spa water - after start-up in new pools - where it readily dissolves. Some salt will fall undissolved to the bottom, but it is readily dispersed with a few strokes of a brush. The salt then stays in solution by virtue of a regenerative process and is therefore lost only through splash-out or backwashing.

This is the same basic method used to generate chlorine in a factory -only on a much smaller scale. Indeed, this electrolytic method of producing chlorine has been used by chlor/alkali manufacturers since the turn of the century.

A Constant Shock

The number 1 appeal of the system lies in the fact that the only place where chlorine actually exists in its sanitizing form is in the water itself: There are no bottles of chlorine to carry or store, no tablets, sticks or granules to dissolve.

Once the system is installed and the pool is dosed with salt, circulating water passes through an in-line device containing electrolytic plates that transform the dissolved salt into chlorine gas.

"You don't have the hassles or the expense that goes along with chlorinating a pool with commercial forms of chlorine,"

"Being relieved of the need to add chlorine to the water makes people very happy - and so does the quality of the water these systems produce."

Because water passing through the electrode chamber is effectively superchlorinated by chlorine gas, chloramines are constantly broken down and eliminated from the system. This means no more red eyes, itchy skin, hair damage or faded swimsuits.

"You're perpetually shocking a small amount of the water,"

"That's why pools using any of these systems available on the market don't typically have the familiar "chlorine smell".

Service Appeal

Between the benefits of constant chlorination, and relief from the burden of storing, transporting and administering chemicals, many service technicians have come to see chlorine generation as a means of streamlining route service.

"Our service people love these systems," reports a Pool Service Company in San Rafael, Ca. "It saves them a lot of work in transporting chemicals. The other side it that our customers and especially their kids love it too: They say they can swim under water with their eyes open and that the water has a soft, smooth kind of feel to it."