





CHECK



Your patrons may be all set to dive into a new season, but is your pool ready for them? Get set for opening day with our expert-approved checklist. | by Kendra Kozen

IT OUT

As they wave goodbye to the last patrons of the season, some operators may breathe a sigh of relief, but George Rohman is already busy making lists of what needs to be done before the doors open again next year.

“Our goal is to get everything repaired in the fall, by December,” says Rohman, operations manager at Morey’s Piers and Beachfront Waterparks in Wildwood, N.J. “If you don’t start early, you end up with a chore list that’s longer than [your staff] can handle.”


Of course, no matter how much you’ve prepared, there’s always more to be done before you’re ready to open the doors for the next season. So we asked several industry veterans to share



their to-do lists. Here’s what they recommend for inclusion in your opening-day prep list.


Pre-opening check

Things might get pretty hectic in your run up to opening day, but there are a few things you’ll need to deal with before you can get started on the big stuff.

 **Organize.** “Being thorough is the key,” says Bill Hamilton, principal of Bill Hamilton and Associates, an industry consulting firm based in Clermont, Fla. He says careful strategic planning also is essential: “If you’re still doing things at the last minute, then you didn’t plan ahead. [Also, remember that] weather patterns may hold things up.”

To help streamline the process, Franceen Gonzales, corporate director of aquatics at

Great Wolf Resorts, based in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., recommends organizing projects by trade, such as landscaping, painting, carpentry, HVAC or electrical. She makes separate lists for each. “That way, you can coordinate work if you need a contractor come out,” she says. Rohman says he always likes to have another person along when inspecting his facility, to be sure everything is accounted for.

 **Update.** Another important consideration: Make sure your chemical and maintenance contracts are in effect and everything in your facility is up to state and local codes.

“Licensing depends on what your agency is,” says Scott Runkle, aquatics/safety supervisor at the Skokie Park District in Skokie, Ill., and president of the National Recreation & Park Association’s Aquatics Branch.

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“Rules will vary from state to state, and some counties and towns also regulate. Operators should look at inspection as a positive. It can help with budgeting if you can show that you need [to have] something [equipment, repair, etc.] to qualify as operational.”

Jason Jones, assistant manager of ice/aquatics for the Park District of Highland Park, Ill., agrees: “[At our facility], several inspections are performed on all slides, equipment, structures and buildings [to ensure] that they’re up to fire, state and PDRMA [Park District Risk Management Association] codes and standards.”

Order up. Remember to place orders for anything you need as early as possible to avoid back orders, Gonzales says. Staff uniforms, chemicals, safety equipment, cleaning items, concessions, sunscreen and other protective gear and first aid supplies are among the items that Alison Osinski, principal of Aquatic Consulting Services in San Diego, would put on her short list.

Take the time to properly clean and store any winter items, including your pool cover and plugs. A little bit of extra effort will go a long way to maintaining these products.

Cover the basics. This includes making sure your water supply and phone service are back online, Osinski says. It also includes your electricity.

Prep your cleaning equipment, tools and testing supplies. According to Gonzales, they will take a beating during the season (as well as during preparations), so you want to be sure you have everything you need and it’s ready to go.

The pool

Obviously, the pool is your main attraction, so you’ll want to take special care in cleaning and filling it. Dr. Randy Schaffer of Adolph Kiefer and Associates in Zion, Ill., says your preparation process will differ depending on whether the pool has been drained or just covered. Here’s a closer look at what the experts recommend.

Clean. Regardless of your pool’s condition during the off-season, your first steps should be cleaning.

If the pool has been drained, start by sweeping out any large debris such as decaying leaves, dead critters or trash. Do not try to remove this large material by pumping it out, Osinski warns. Next, wash the entire

surface and remove stains by following manufacturer’s recommended procedures. If your pool has been covered, you’ll have to pull out any large flotsam and vacuum, Schaffer says. And Osinski recommends draining the entire pool with a trash pump.

You’ll also want to clean and replace skimmer baskets, weirs and lids, Osinski adds. When reinstalling the hair and lint skimmer basket, remember to replace gaskets or O-rings and “make sure the lid seals tightly,” she says.

Inspect. Hamilton suggests going over the entire pool surface and treating it as if there was a baby crawling around. “Walk the floor of the pool [if you have a plaster pool] and make sure that there are no hollow sounds. Check expansion joints, ladders, stairs and handrails for any damage or rough edges,” Hamilton says. It’s also important to see that all depth markers, lane lines, step edges and other graphics are marked legibly and accurately. This may require painting or touch-ups.

Drains, grates, bolts, gaskets and inlets also require a close look. You’ll need to inspect, replace and resecure drains and drain covers (Remember, the new federal law mandates drain covers for single main drain

SLIP SLIDING AWAY!

In prepping for a new season of aquatic fun, slides and slide towers all require special attention. Here are several tips to prepare these attractions.

PERFORM AN OVERALL INSPECTION. “We perform slide inspections to make sure they’re up to date with all state and PDRMA codes,” says Jason Jones, assistant manager of ice/aquatics for the Park District of Highland Park, Ill. You’ll definitely want to check seams, to make sure there are no leaks, and bolts, for rust.

CLEAN IT UP. George Rohman, operations manager at Morey’s Piers and Beachfront Waterparks in Wildwood, N.J., recommends pressure washing the entire slide. You’ll also need to apply wax.

MAKE REPAIRS. Tony Bates, operations manager at Wet Zone, Rowlett’s Family Waterpark in Rowlett, Texas, sands and repaints annually. Remember to follow manufacturer’s instructions when making such repairs.

PREPARE ALL STAIRS AND HANDRAILS. Inspect all nonskid surfaces, handrails and stair treads to make sure they’re secure and in place, Rohman says. Pay special attention to highlight stripping, and repaint or recoat if necessary.

CHECK YOUR FLOW. Once you’re ready to go, check that your flow is as it should be, Rohman says. Again, consult manufacturer’s recommendations.



PHOTOS BY ALICIA PATEL

CATCHING A WAVE

Wave pools can take a beating during a busy season. Following are several suggestions to get your wave pool ready for opening day.

PREP THE HYDRAULIC ROOM. The wave-generating equipment will cause an oil film to form, so you'll want to degrease and repaint the walls and floor, says Bill Hamilton, principal of Bill Hamilton and Associates, an industry consulting firm in Clermont, Fla. He adds that seasonal facilities may not notice after one season, but if the hydraulic room is not kept clean, after a few years, the greasy coating will be noticeable. Simply running a finger along the wall will give you an indication of whether you have buildup.

REPLACE PARTS. You'll want to replace solenoid valves as well as tubing and air cylinders, Hamilton says.

INSPECT DEPTH MARKERS AND DRAIN GRATES. Just as you would in a standard pool, make sure markers and signs are legible and clear, and drain grates are secure, suggests Franceen Gonzales, corporate director of aquatics at Great Wolf Resorts, based in Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Keep in mind that there are new federal laws regarding drains and drain covers.

TIME TEST. Once your system is ready to go, you'll have to test the mechanism to ensure that the wave timing is right. "There are valves [on the wave-generating system] that open and close to allow air to pass at regular intervals," Gonzales explains. "The timing of the opening and closing will determine the sharpness of the wave. If the timing is off, air will pass, but does not create a good wave."



pools). This includes bolting down the main drain and checking for proper operation of the hydrostatic relief valve. As you ready the drains, remember to uncap inlets and remove all winterizing plugs and expansion blocks first.

Repair. Once you fill the pool, it will be very difficult to do things such as repaint or fix tile or lights, so now's your chance.

"You'll never have another opportunity to address any problems better," Schaffer observes. Repairs could mean sandblasting, acid washing, chlorine washing, recoating, repainting, replastering, patching liner tears, or otherwise preparing the pool surface, Osinski says. When it comes to lighting, replace broken or burnt-out lights, check seals, lubricate bolts and see that all ground wires are connected.

Test. In filling the pool and balancing the water, a good place to start is by testing the incoming

water. "[To prevent damaging your pool surface], know what the water chemistry is before you put it into your pool," Hamilton says. "This is especially important if you have a brand-new pool surface."

You'll also want to "pressure test all of your circulation lines to make sure the pipes have not broken during the off-season, and repair broken pipes before leaks develop," Osinski says. Test the manual air pressure relief valves on pressurized filter tanks as well, she adds.

Fill. Osinski advises operators to start filling their pools approximately one week prior to opening day. As soon as the water level covers inlets, begin circulating and filtering water.

You'll also need to "add sequestering or chelating agents to prevent mineral staining; superchlorinate or use a nonchlorine shock product to oxidize organic contaminants out of the water and prevent an algae bloom; add a clarifier so suspended particles will floc and either settle or filter out of the water, [and

finally] balance the water," Osinski says.

Once you've filled the pool and are balancing the water, Schaffer says, there are a few things to consider: (1) You'll want to start with a baseline reading and add chemical from there. (2) When you've got your systems going, it's important to continually test the water in several areas for at least 24 to 48 hours. (3) Don't forget to account for the anticipated opening day bather load. Your water may be perfect when the pool is empty, but that will change quickly once guests dive in.

Equipment rooms

When it comes to readying your pool for another busy summer, one of the most important areas of concern should be the pump room and plumbing.

"[These] systems are probably the most important and expensive to work on, so I like to look at the site from the ground up," Gonzales says. Jones agrees, saying that he brings in an outside company to "summer-ize" and inspect his pumps. Generally, you'll want

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to make sure that everything is clean and all metal parts are lubricated properly.

Even though guests will never see your pump room, one of the first things to think about is the condition of the area. "The way things are maintained reflects on your staff," Hamilton says. "If things are strictly maintained, then they'll take their jobs more seriously. If they come into something that's spotless and you tell them you want it kept that way, they'll be more likely to do it."

Following are some other items for you to consider.

Filters. Assess the quality of your filtration medium. It should be loose, not caked or solid. With sand filters, Hamilton recommends raking off the top layer to remove any hair or lint. For DE filters, he suggests a thorough inspection of the grid to make sure it's not broken. "If you see any threading, it's time for a replacement," he adds.

Chemical controllers. Before bringing your chemical controllers online, several key items should be checked: (1) Make sure the chlorinator, controllers and feed pumps are reinstalled and connected properly. (2) Inspect and clean ORP/pH probes. "They do have a life expectancy, so make sure they don't need to be replaced," Hamilton says. (3) Inspect chlorine feeders and replace tubing.

Water heaters. Generally, you'll need to relight the pilot light and check electrical connections. Unless you or someone on your staff is an expert, Hamilton recommends bringing in an outside person to inspect your water heaters.

Pumps. Reassemble circulation pipes, pumps and motor, if necessary. Drain and clean anything that's

been filled with antifreeze, Osinski says. Hamilton recommends checking all low-grade pump areas and sump pump systems.

Safety Equipment. Clean and check eyewash station(s) and make sure safety signage is clear. Hamilton also urges operators to see that their Material Safety Data Sheets are in place and current.

Meters and gauges. Service and reinstall flow meters, pressure and vacuum gauges, thermometers, and hygrometers, Osinski says. Also make sure labeling is clear and legible on all gauges and other equipment, Hamilton adds.

Pool deck/ancillary facilities

Just as the pump room needs to be in order, so do your pool deck and ancillary facilities, including restrooms, locker areas, concessions and storage areas. "This is your

THE PLAY'S THE THING

For dry play *and* aquatic play, you'll want to follow these guidelines to prepare your play structures.

CHECK FOR RUST. Water, as well as the acids in many cleaning products, will cause oxidation. "If you see rust, you've got an issue," says Bill Hamilton, principal of Bill Hamilton and Associates, an industry consulting firm in Clermont, Fla. On play structures, bolts and clamps are two items that may begin to rust, so Hamilton suggests that operators "take care of it sooner rather than later" and replace any rusty elements promptly.


MAKE SURE IT WORKS. Play areas have a lot of smaller interactive parts and items that could get broken or damaged during a regular season. "In the fall before draining, we turn everything on and make sure it all works. If your maintenance program is good, you should be able to fix everything as you go," says George Rohman, operations manager at Morey's Piers and Beachfront Waterparks in Wildwood, N.J. Your run-through also should include an inspection of any cargo netting, according to Hamilton.


ELIMINATE CALCIUM BUILDUP. "A lot of spray areas get a calcium buildup, so you'll have to apply a calcium remover," Rohman says. Most acid-based cleaners designed to remove calcium buildup work well, "along with some good, old-fashioned elbow grease," he adds.

GET TOUCHY. Children tend to touch everything in play areas, so make sure there are no sharp edges or catch points, says Franceen Gonzales, corporate director of aquatics at Great Wolf Resorts, based in Wisconsin Dells, Wis.





opportunity to get everything ready. It should all be the cleanest it can be,” Schaffer says. He recommends working from the outside in. Following are several other expert tips.


 **Deck furniture and equipment.** Clean, disinfect and inspect the deck and deck equipment, including chairs and lifeguard stands. “How clean the external is will affect the pool water,” Schaffer says. Power-wash the entire area and treat any stains by following manufacturer’s recommended suggestions, Rohman says. When inspecting your deck area, he suggests watching for cracks and anything that may have broken during the winter.

 **Safety equipment.** Inspect, inventory and clean all safety equipment, including lifeguard rescue tubes. Remember, this includes prepping all record and data sheets and logs, as well as safety manuals and staff documents, Osinski says.

 **Storage areas.** Inventory existing supplies and make sure storage areas are clean and ready to receive new stock. By keeping good records of what you’ve ordered in the past, you should avoid problems in ordering new supplies, Schaffer says.

 **Bathhouse.** Is everything clean and all maintenance items have been addressed? Your guests will notice if something is not as it should be. Also remember that if you’re using your bathhouse as a winter storage area, you’ll need to plan to get everything out and cleaned well ahead of time. “You only have so many days to make money, so you won’t have a lot of other opportunities [to care for these areas],” Gonzales says.

 **Parking lots, fencing and office areas.** These are some of the first areas that your staff will need, so be sure they’re in tiptop shape as early as possible. “Do a good visual check for things like environmental damage and vandalism,” Rohman says. Over at Jones’ facility, professional landscapers are brought in to make sure that everything is ready.

 **Signage.** Signs are key to ensuring patron comfort and safety, so take the time to see that your signage is in good condition. All signs should be updated, clean and posted prior to opening day. “Make sure [they] are legible and current,” Gonzales says.
Looking at the preceding to-do list, it may

seem overwhelming, but hard work will pay off once patrons enter a fresh facility in excellent shape. “It makes a great start to the season when you know you have everything 100 percent,” Hamilton says. “And as you [open your pool] each year, you’ll get better and better at it. You’ll come to know some of your specific problem areas.” ■