

Ask Al

Alvaro G. Mendoza | Commercial Energy Specialists, Inc.



Welcome back to our “Ask the Expert” feature, designed to assist you with issues related to swimming pool water, mechanical equipment, space conditioning and code compliance. Ask a question, and we will try to answer to the best of our ability.

Q: *We are in the process of planning and building a new indoor facility dedicated to teaching lessons, along with other opportunities like therapy, lifeguard training, etc. We are thinking of having several pools – one for regular lessons, one for toddlers and maybe one for special purposes. What are the pros and cons of building several pools?*

A: Great question! We’ve had the opportunity to work with many swim school owners that WANTED multiple pools, and it always came down to how many pools they actually NEEDED. We will approach this from more of a “mechanical” perspective, and let your Swim Consultant handle the business development end.

Historical Reasons for Multiple Pools Include:

- Different purposes (*swim team training, stroke development, swim lessons, lifeguard training, party rentals, etc.*)
- Simultaneous activities (*swim team practice while teaching lessons, etc.*)
- Segregating age groups (*babies, toddlers, etc.*)

- Crowd control or movement of patrons.

Here are the Major Considerations:

Temperature:

- Temperature is probably the number one determinant of how many pools you really need. It is virtually impossible to have a pool at 78-82F for the local swim team at 7:00 AM, and have it 90F for swim lessons at 9:00 AM, and back again. So temperature IS a major decision point on how many pools you need. Each pool should be equipped with its own heater, so it is easy to regulate the temperature.

NOTE: Very few patrons can actually tell the difference between 89F and 90F, so if you use different temperature as a major decision point, many have found that it should be based on a significant temperature difference.

Money:

- Money might be the number one determinant of how many pools you need, but if not, it is a close second. Why? It costs a lot more to build another pool, than it does to make your main pool a little longer or wider, or to add an “L” section for another purpose. Not only does each pool shell cost more to form, construct, and pipe, but most health codes require (*and it is best practice*) that EACH body of water have its own piping, circulation, filtration and treatment system (*more below*).

NOTE: Many schools have successfully found ways to segregate age groups while using the same pool. This was done by providing an “L” section, multiple lanes, in-pool half walls, etc. So, you really don’t need to have a separate pool to have separate activities.

It does not cost a lot to make a pump or filter slightly larger to accommodate the bigger pool, but it costs a lot more to supply a separate mechanical package for another pool.

Wet Area Space:

It takes much more room to build multiple pools than it does to build a larger pool – even if the square footage is the same. Why? This is because many health codes require a minimum of 4-5’ clear space around each pool. One school was toying with building two pools totaling 1,800SF of water. They were able to reduce the deck space by up to 1,300-1,500SF by going to one pool. This meant that both the wet area and the dehumidification system not only cost a bit less up front, but the smaller area also costs less to operate on a monthly basis.

Equipment Room Space:

Since each body of water normally requires additional equipment, then having multiple pools can balloon the required equipment room space. Also, each pump, filter and heater system requires floor space and extra maintenance clearances, which really adds up. Filters and heaters are normally stacked in order to save

space. However, space is a big deal in most lease sites, and valuable interior space can cost big bucks each month.

Other Considerations:

- Not always good to share: A few facilities have cut space and costs by operating two distinct pools with one mechanical and treatment package. This is accomplished by having a large "equalizer" pipe between the two bodies of water, thus allowing the water level to flow between the two. This practice is not allowed by the Department of Health in many states, but is also not optimum.

Why? If both bodies of water were to have the exact bather loads, you might be OK. The problem is most always don't. So a heavily used toddler pool and a lightly-used baby pool will de-chlorinate at different rates. The combined water in the filtration system would

be a blend or "average" of the two chemistry levels. The chemical control system would read this average, and as needed, would inject additional chemicals, but to both pools. The end result over time is that one pool normally ends up being a bit "over-chlorinated" while the other one ends up "under-chlorinated". In any event, some get really close with lots of vigilance, but you don't really have pinpoint control over your ever-important water chemistry.

- Revenue contribution: Some owners were going to build a second pool so that they could train lifeguards once a month. It turned out that the necessary design plans called for a different pool design that was not conducive to lessons, so at the end it was a financial decision....do we want to spend \$X thousands to make a few dollars each month.

So, how many pools do you NEED? There is no right answer, but it normally comes down to your budget, how many pools are going to help contribute to your bottom line and how many pools will help you grow your business per your master plan. Lofty dreams of multiple pools often go away during the budgeting process if they are not really necessary to your overall game plan, so there is no harm done. Many owners have been able to make a compromise with pool temperatures and scheduling and have operated highly successful and profitable operations with a single pool.

Hope this helped, but let us know if you have any additional questions.

Best Regards,

ALVARO G. MENDOZA

Please feel free to forward your questions & comments through the USSSA office, or directly to me via email at amendoza@ceswaterquality.com

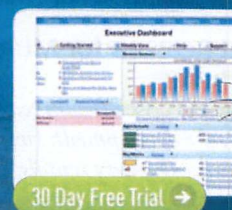
*Came to class with a smile
Swam length of pool
Loved every minute*

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS

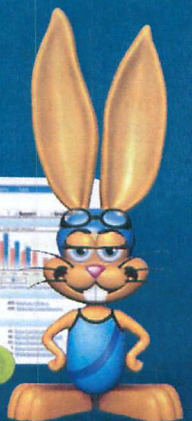
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