

Private Residential Pools and Spas Drowning Facts and Prevention Tips for Homeowners

A backyard pool or spa can be lots of fun for the whole family, but there are some important things to remember before installing your new pool or spa.

Did You Know...

- Among children ages 1 to 4 years, most drownings occur in residential swimming pools. Most young children who drowned in pools were last seen in the home, had been out of sight less than 5 minutes, and were in the care of one or both parents at the time. (*Washington State Dept of Health*)
- Drowning is the 2nd leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1-14 in the U.S.



Children are attracted to water. They can easily slip out the door to the pool or spa and fall in if there is no barrier. Once a child falls in, they usually don't scream for help, they simply slip under the water quietly.

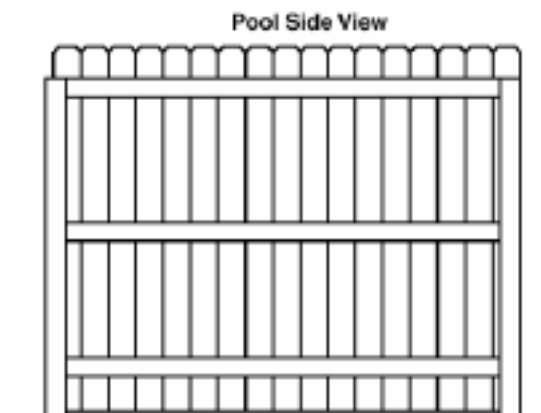
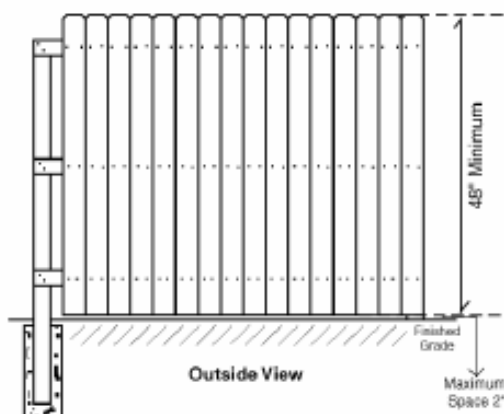
As a homeowner it is your responsibility to ensure that your pool or spa will not be a danger to young children and meets state and local building code requirements. By following these requirements and installing proper barriers for your new or existing pool or spa you can prevent drowning deaths.

There are new Washington State building code requirements for residential pools and spas. The following are required as of **July 1st, 2007**, and you have a variety of options for pool and spa barriers. As these are minimum requirements, it is also important to contact your local building official as they may have different requirements. Options include:

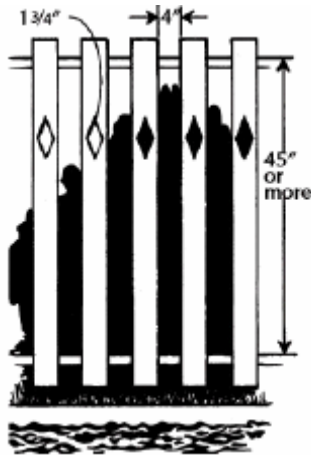
- A 4-sided barrier that is **at least** 4 feet high and surrounds the pool or spa. The gate for this fence needs to:
 - be out of the child's reach
 - be self-closing/self-latching

Examples of fences that meet the regulations:

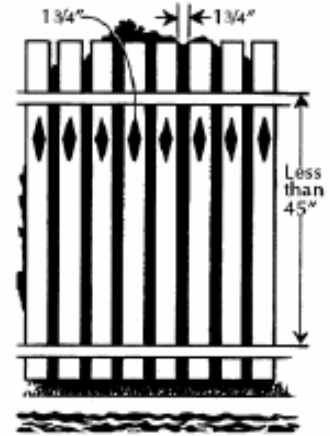
a.) Solid barriers/ fences need to be **at least** 48 inches high and gaps between the fence and ground need to be less than 2 inches.



b.) Barriers and fences with vertical spacing



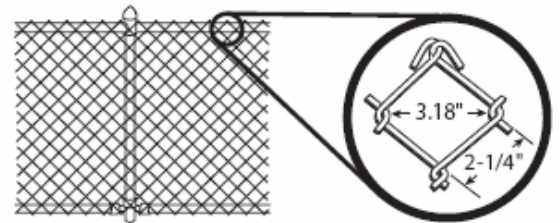
If top of horizontal members are **greater than 45 inches apart** then the vertical members cannot be more than **4 inches**.



If top of horizontal members are **less than 45 inches apart** then the vertical members cannot be more than **1 3/4 inches**.

c.) Chain link or mesh fences

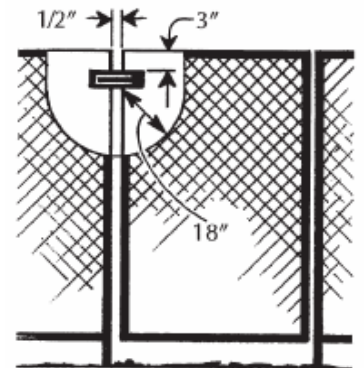
The **maximum** mesh size for these types of fences is **2.25 inches square with a 3.18 inches across**. If you have chain link or mesh fences with this spacing, placing slats in the fence to reduce to 1.75 inches will reduce the footholds and ability to climb over the fence.



d.) Self-latching/ self-closing gates

If the release mechanism of the self-latching gate is **less than 54 inches** from the bottom of the gate, the release mechanism for the gate should be **at least 3 inches below the top of the gate on the side facing the pool**. This placement prevents a child from reaching over the top of the gate and releasing the latch.

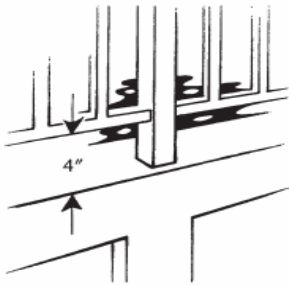
The gate should not have an opening **greater than 1/2 inch** within **18 inches** of the latch release mechanism. This also prevents a child from reaching through and releasing the gate.



For Above Ground Pools (water depth over 2 feet):

These types of pools also need barriers. There are two ways to do this: **1.)** The steps/ladder going up to the pool can be removed or **2.)** the steps or ladder can be surrounded by a barrier. This barrier needs to meet the regulations of the barriers described above.





In addition, if an above-ground pool has a barrier on the top of the pool the **maximum vertical clearance between the top of the pool and bottom of the barrier should not exceed 4 inches.**

Having these barriers for above-ground pools can prevent a child from climbing into them.

More on barriers

The house can serve as one the sides of the barrier. The other 3 sides still need to follow the same barrier regulations described above. If the house is serving as a side of the fence:

- There needs to be an **alarm on doors that have direct access to the pool.** These doors need to have an alarm that sounds when the door or screen is opened. The alarm needs to sound for **at least 30 seconds within 7 seconds after the door is opened.**
- The alarm also needs to be **at least 85 decibels when measured 10 feet away** and should be distinct from other household sounds (TV, doorbell, smoke alarm, etc). The alarm can have a switch that **temporarily deactivates it for up to 15 seconds**, so adults can pass in and out of the house without setting off the alarm. This deactivation switch pad shall be located **at least 54 inches** above the threshold of the door covered by the alarm (this is the reaching ability for most young children).

A power safety cover is another barrier option for pools and a safety cover is an option for spas. This cover needs to support the weight of a young child and meets the safety performance requirements of the American Society for Testing and Materials Standards. If your private pool or spa has a power safety cover or safety cover (that meets all standards) it can be used as a barrier and other barriers are **not** necessarily.

A note to homeowners about insurance policies:

As a homeowner it is your responsibility to contact your insurance agency about your new pool or spa to ensure proper coverage from your homeowner's insurance. Your insurance agent should be aware of these new barrier regulations and how they may affect your current policy.

More tips on drowning prevention:

RESTRICT ACCESS TO THE POOL- The Association of Pool and Spa Professions (ASSP) recommends being aware of objects (like tables and chairs) that may allow children to climb over barriers and reach the pool or spa. In addition, tree limbs and overhanging roofs should be removed or made inaccessible in order to prevent contact with the pool or spa.

MORE SUPERVISION - One of the easiest ways to prevent drowning in pools and spas in our backyards is supervision! According to *Safe Kids USA*, drowning is a quick and silent killer. In the time it takes to ...

...cross the room for a towel (10 seconds), a child in the bathtub can become submerged.

...answer the phone (2 minutes), that child can lose consciousness.

...sign for a package at your front door (4 to 6 minutes), a child submerged in the bathtub or pool can sustain permanent brain damage.

More information located at:

- **Your local building official** - <http://www.wabo.org/jurisdiction/map.html>
- **Washington State Building Code Council** - <http://www.sbcc.wa.gov/sbccindx.html>
- **Association of Pool and Spa Professionals** - www.theapsp.org
- **U.S. Consumer Safety Product Commission – safety tips**
<http://www.cpsc.gov/tips.html>
- **Your local public health department** - <http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm>
- **Injury Fact Sheets-**
http://www.usa.safekids.org/content_documents/Drowning_facts.pdf
Clear Danger: A National Study of Childhood Drowning and Related Attitudes and Behaviors (2004) - <http://www.usa.safekids.org/NSKW.cfm>
- **Injury and Violence Prevention, Public Health- Seattle & King County**
Pool and Water Safety
<http://www.metrokc.gov/HEALTH/injury/drowning.htm>
- **Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center**
Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Information
www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/ or www.drowning-prevention.org
- **Safe Kids USA** - <http://www.usa.safekids.org/index.cfm>

Produced by Public Health-Seattle & King County, Camille Samujh, MPH & Tony Gomez, RS. Grant funding by Safe Kids Worldwide through Washington State Department of Health. May 10, 2007