

## Pools – the silent threat to pets

By Bob Lyons

Although most healthy dogs and cats have an innate ability to swim short distances, escape from a pool may be a life and death struggle. Barking is often difficult once the pet is in the water. The untrained animal instinctively heads for the closest edge of the pool and tries to claw its way out. Clawing on concrete breaks nails to the quick, worsening panic. Water is ingested and breathing laboured. The animal is exhausted within minutes.

Accidental drowning of a pet in the family pool is

common and incidents typically go unreported. “Both the numbers and the circumstances of the pet drowning stories I’ve been getting over 10 years leave me in no doubt about this,” says Bob Lyons, President of Terrapin Communications, a firm that developed and markets a unique immersive alarm that is worn by pets to protect them against drowning.

With a growing pet population – there are roughly 60 million dogs and 67 million cats in North America – and approximately 450,000 new pools per year, accidental pet drowning will continue to rise unless some-

thing changes; 41.3% of pool owners have at least one pet.

Very young, very old, and handicapped animals are most at risk of accidentally falling in a pool. A healthy animal who has escaped a close call won’t go near the pool, but this is rather cruel training.

While animals can be progressively trained to head for steps at the shallow end, if they exist, the steps may be too high for a smaller animal. Steps below the water line are invisible, so an untrained animal will never recognize them as an exit, particularly in an emergency. Vinyl-liner pools offer no grip to the animal, and often include only a vertical ladder, which is nearly impossible for most pets to climb or cling to. Most vinyl-liner pool builders have the experience of repairing foot-long holes through pool liners at the waterline caused by a front paw of the owner’s canine.

Solar covers are particularly dangerous for pets. They either fall on the cover, or try to walk on it, go under and can’t get back up.

### Pet owners with pools should ask themselves:

- Is escape from the pool possible for my pet?
- Can my pet swim?
- Is my pet trained to escape?

If the answer to any of the above questions is “no”, then rescue of the animal within two to five minutes may be life critical.

If the pet owner swims in the pool with their pet, and the pet gets out unassisted, drowning prevention is not likely a concern. Pet owners should be aware that pool chemicals, notably chlorine, are much more harmful to pets [and infants] who may ingest them. A salt chlorinator or ozonator is an appealing remedy, but it’s important to shock the pool once finished for the day.

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