MEDFORD
PUBLIC WORKS

Disposal of Chlorinated or Saltwater from Swimming Pools, Hot Tubs, and Spas

Water from pools, hot tubs, and spas often contains high levels of chlorine, salt, and other treatment chemicals, such as algaecides, bromine, and pH adjusters. Discharging this water into streams, irrigation canals, ponds, or the storm drain system can harm fish and other aquatic life and may violate federal, state, and local water quality regulations. Most storm drains in Medford discharge directly to local creeks without treatment.

This fact sheet provides best management practices (BMPs) to minimize the environmental impacts of water discharged from swimming pools, hot tubs, and spas. These requirements apply to both residential and commercial pool and spa owners.

General Rules for All Pool and Spa Discharges

- Chlorinated water must not be discharged into the storm drain system or surface waters without proper treatment.
- Saltwater or filter backwash water must **never** be discharged to the storm drain system. All saltwater and backwash must go to the sanitary sewer (SS) via a sanitary sewer cleanout on your property.
- Do not discharge pool or spa water into a septic system, as the volume and chemical content can cause system failure.
- **Pool water previously treated with copper-based algaecides must not be discharged to the storm drain system.** Copper is highly toxic to aquatic organisms. If a copper algaecide has been used in the pool within the last 6 months, discharge to the sanitary sewer instead. We recommend using non-copper based algae treatments like Quats (quaternary ammonium) or Polyquats (polyquaternary). Check with your local pool supplier or online pool store.

Important: Before using the existing swimming pool or spa pump and plumbing system to discharge water, verify whether the pump discharge line is connected to the property's sanitary sewer system or to a system that discharges to the storm drain **to ensure compliance with the requirements above.** If you are unsure about your pool discharge plumbing, this verification should be performed by a licensed pool contractor or other qualified professional familiar with these systems.

Rules and Procedures by Discharge Type

Commercial Saltwater Pools

Contact the City of Medford Water Reclamation Division at **541-774-2750** prior to any discharge of saltwater to the sanitary sewer system. Each situation will be evaluated individually.

Commercial Chlorinated Pools

Follow the same dechlorination and discharge requirements listed below for residential chlorinated pools and spas.

Residential Chlorinated Pools and Spas

Note: Wherever practicable, chlorinated water should be disposed so it does not enter a storm drain system or a local creek. Non-discharge alternatives such as land disposal or irrigation (deep watering of trees and shrubs) or sanitary sewer disposal should be evaluated before considering a discharge to a storm drain.

To discharge pool or spa water to a public or private storm drain system, the water must be dechlorinated first and must not contain salt or copper algaecides. Follow these steps:

1. Shut off the chlorination system (if equipped) or stop adding chlorine.

2. Allow the water to sit uncovered for at least 7–10 days (in warm, sunny weather) to allow chlorine to dissipate naturally through sunlight and aeration. Alternatively, add a dechlorinating agent such as sodium thiosulfate, sulfur dioxide, or sulfite salts (available at pool supply stores in liquid, tablet, or granular form). Use the minimum amount recommended by the manufacturer and monitor with a test kit.

3. Before discharge, test the water and confirm all of the following:

- Total residual chlorine is 0.1 ppm (mg/L) or lower.
- pH is between 6.5 and 8.5.
- No copper-based algaecide has been added within the past 6 months.

4. Residents are encouraged to irrigate by deep watering trees and shrubs on their property as long as it does not flow off their property or onto neighboring properties. Alternatively, once all conditions above are met, discharge to a private or City storm drain system is acceptable.

5. If you cannot dechlorinate the water, discharge or irrigate in an area where the water will not flow into a stream or storm drain system. Alternatively, chlorinated water may be discharged into the sanitary sewer system via a sanitary sewer cleanout on your property.

Residential Saltwater Pools and Spas

It is not allowed to discharge saltwater from a pool or spa to a public or private storm drain system. Saltwater pools and spas must be discharged to the sanitary sewer system, via a sanitary sewer cleanout on your property.

- Salt is very harmful to fish and aquatic species in our local creeks. All storm drains in Medford discharge directly to these waterways.
- Do not discharge saltwater onto landscaping. Salt accumulation damages soil structure and can kill plants over time.
- Do not discharge saltwater into a septic system.

Backwashing Pool and Spa Filters (All Types)

It is not allowed to backwash pool or spa filters to a public or private storm drain system.

Chlorinated Pool/Spa Backwash

- Backwash water must be discharged to the sanitary sewer system via a SS cleanout, or onto a landscape area fully contained within your property. (Note: it is possible that your pool discharge line is already connected to your sanitary sewer line. Verify this with a qualified contractor)
- Cartridge filters should be rinsed over a landscaped area or into a sink or bathtub – never into a storm drain, street, or gutter.

Saltwater Pool and Spa Backwash

- **All saltwater and backwash must be discharged to the sanitary sewer system only.** Do not discharge saltwater backwash onto landscaping, yards, or any area where it may reach the storm drain system.

Filter Media

- Diatomaceous earth (DE) and cellulose fiber from filter backwash can clog fish gills and smother fish eggs in streambeds. These materials must be contained and must not enter the storm drain system. Use a separation tank or bag the material for disposal.

City of Medford Resources

→ Stormwater Information **541-774-2600**
→ Disposal to the Wastewater (Sewer) System **541-774-2750**

*Improper discharge of pool, spa, or hot tub water may result in enforcement action under federal, state, and local water quality regulations. When in doubt**, prior to discharge**, contact the City of Medford Stormwater Division at 541-774-2600.*