

# Fact Sheet

## Skimmer box injuries



### What are skimmer boxes?

Skimmer boxes form part of the filtration system in spa pools and swimming pools and are designed to remove dirt, leaves and other material from the water. They are of open construction and integrally moulded into the structure of the pool. Some skimmer boxes do not have a fixed lid (being a lid which can only be removed by the use of a tool).

### How can children be injured as a result of their use?

Children may be trapped by the skimmer box and subjected to the full force of the pool suction pump if it does not have a protective lid. A child's limbs, hair, hair accessory, jewellery, or swimsuit may become trapped and injuries can be sustained within a few seconds. Children can sustain major internal injuries including disembowelment by the strong suction formed after sitting in the potty-shaped skimmer box.

In most cases, due to the strong suction force, it is impossible to free the person. The only way to accomplish this without causing severe injury is to turn off the pool filter pump.

### How common are these injuries?

In the United States, during the period from 1999 to 2007, 74 reports of circulation entrapments were made to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Nine of these injuries resulted in death. The majority of the injuries and deaths occurred in residential swimming pools. Eight of the nine deaths and 37 of the 74 injuries were in children aged 5-14 years. While it is known that skimmer boxes cause serious injuries in Australia, there are no published statistics currently available. At the Children's Hospital at Westmead, there have been two cases admitted over the past five years (2005-2009). Both survived but had serious bowel injuries.

### Legislation

Since 1993, all pools and spas in NSW are required to have safe skimmer boxes due to the severe internal injuries that can occur from sitting on the pool's skimmer box. However, many residences still have the old style skimmer boxes and are unaware of the high injury risk posed to children.



**Dangerous skimmer box**



**Safe modified skimmer box**

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### How can you tell if your skimmer box is safe?

Safe, new style skimmer boxes should have a permanent dome-shaped protective lid and a safety skirt so children can not sit on the skimmer box. Old or second hand pools may have the old style skimmer boxes, which need to be fitted with a permanent dome-shaped protective lid and a safety skirt. If your skimmer box has a protective lid and safety skirt, make sure that they are securely fixed in place, not loose or damaged and can only be removed with the use of a tool.

### How can you make your skimmer box safe?

If you own a pool with an old 'potty' style skimmer box, you should make sure your pool is safe by arranging for a permanent protective lid to be fixed to the filter inlet. Manufacturers or repairers of fibreglass pools should be able to carry out these repairs (you can find them in the Yellow Pages). Also, your local swimming pool supplier may have a low cost conversion kit for the old style skimmer box.

If you are unsure of whether you have a safe skimmer box, it is best to contact a licensed professional to inspect your pool to determine whether your skimmer box is compliant.

### Remember

- Ensure your skimmer box has a permanent dome-shaped protective lid.
- Make sure no one plays near or with any pool outlets, particularly children.
- Make sure no one enters a pool that has a broken, loose or a missing skimmer box protective lid.
- Know the location of the on/off switch for the pool filter pump in case an incident occurs.
- Ensure that an approved CPR chart is displayed in the pool area.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.  
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional  
to make sure this information is right for your child.

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the  
children's  
hospital at Westmead

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