

Understanding Ohio's Regulations for Public Swimming Pools and Spraygrounds



Public spraygrounds, splashpads, and wet decks are an increasingly popular way to beat summer heat, and more municipalities across Ohio are installing them. But did you know that spraygrounds, splash pads, and wet decks that recirculate water are considered “special use pools” in Ohio and are subject to meeting state regulatory requirements? Under state law, special use pools must be reviewed and inspected by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) during construction and before licensing by the local health department to ensure that they are healthy and safe environments for everyone.

Design plans for special use pools must be sent to the ODH Recreation, Engineering, And Community Health (REACH) Unit for review and approval prior to construction. Information on the standards for construction of special use pools can be found in [Ohio Administrative Code \(OAC\) 3701-31-05.1](#). This rule covers everything from building materials to decks and signage for building public swimming pools, including special use pools. Plans for public swimming pools and special use pools should be approved by ODH prior to submission to a building department and before breaking ground and beginning construction.

Once plans are approved by ODH and construction begins, inspections must be requested by the pool operator or contractor. The inspection includes inspecting all pipes and drains, which is called a rough or underground inspection. This inspection must be completed before the pipes and drains are covered with fill or concrete.

After the rough/underground inspection is complete, the rest of the public swimming pool or special use pool can be built. When construction is completed and ready for use, a final inspection must be requested by the pool operator or contractor to receive final approval from ODH. Once approved, the next and final step is to obtain a pool license from the local health district.

Minimum standards for the design, installation, operation, and maintenance of public swimming pools including special use pools were established to protect patrons from injury, minimize the potential for

disease transmission, and provide a safe and healthy recreational environment for Ohioans as they enjoy the summer season.

On Jan. 2, 2023, Governor Mike DeWine signed legislation into law known as Makenna's Law. This law, effective April 3, 2023, limits the velocity of water features to not more than 20 feet per second. Operators of water features are strongly encouraged to evaluate the operation of their water features to ensure this velocity is not exceeded.

Pool operators should contact the ODH REACH Unit with questions about how state regulations affect their public swimming pool, sprayground, splashpad, or wet deck. The REACH Unit can be reached at beh@odh.ohio.gov or (614) 644-7438.