

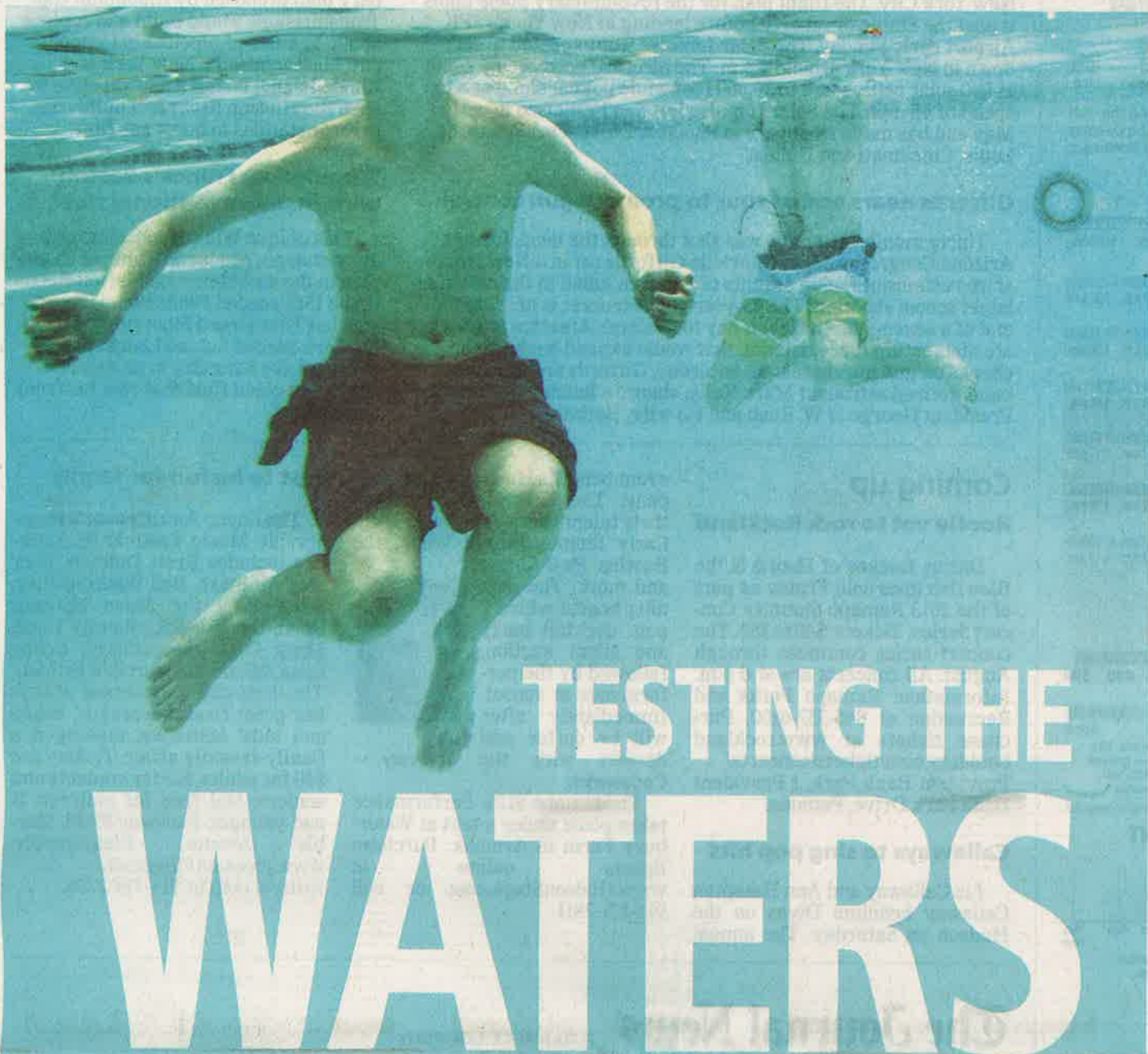
2 DIE IN JET CRASH

Asiana Airlines jet crashes during landing in San Francisco, injuring dozens. Terrorism is ruled out.

NATION 8A

BREAKING NEWS 24/7 AT LOHUD.COM

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TESTING THE WATERS

Health inspections show public pools fared much better than private facilities

By Ernie Garcia :: elgarcia@lohud.com

Thinking of taking a dip? A municipal pool might be a better choice than you think.

A Journal News analysis of county health department inspections of swimming pools found that water was cleaner and pools were better maintained last year at municipal- and county-run facilities than those at condominiums, cooperative apartment buildings and country clubs.

With hundreds of public and private pools inspected last year, Rockland County health inspectors found critical violations at just two municipal pools, in West Nyack and Suffern.

Westchester County health inspectors only found critical violations at two public pools, in White Plains and Mount Vernon. No public pools in Putnam County had critical violations last year.

In contrast, the pool at the Surf Club in New Rochelle logged so many violations last year that the Westchester County Department of Health gave the members-only facility at 280 Davenport Ave. its biggest fine of the year: \$3,850 for 30 critical and minor violations, from low chlorine levels and inadequate

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ON THE WEB

View searchable databases of pool inspection records for Rockland and Westchester, and a file of Putnam pool reports at lohud.com.

WORST OFFENDERS

The biggest fines for each county:

**SURF CLUB,
NEW ROCHELLE**

\$3,850

Low chlorine, opened sans approval.

**PARAMOUNT COUNTRY CLUB,
NEW CITY**

\$2,300

Low chlorine, unapproved chemical.

**HOLLY STREAM
CONDOMINIUM, BREWSTER**

\$400

Low chlorine, no max-capacity sign.

POOLS: Public facilities have the edge

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disinfectant treatment to opening its pool to bathers without a health department approval.

The Surf Club charges \$1,000 for a basic pool-access membership this summer, according to its concierge desk.

Rockland fined two pools last year. The bigger fine for \$2,300 went to the Paramount Country Club at 60 Zukor Road in New City for six critical violations in its main and wading pools due to unapproved chemical application, non-continuous filtration and low chlorine levels; the smaller fine was \$1,100 for the Days Inn in Nanuet.

Managers at the Surf Club and Paramount Country Club did not respond to several requests for comment about the incidents.

The Journal News obtained inspection records from health departments in Putnam, Rockland and Westchester through a Freedom of Information Law request.

The records show that health inspectors regularly closed pools and ordered swimmers out of the water due to various problems.

"We're out there for preventive health," said Peter DeLucia, assistant commissioner of health for the Westchester County Bureau of Public Health Protection. "If we get to a pool and there's zero chlorine, that's closed until the next day."

Low chlorine

New York's sanitary code divides swimming-pool violations into two categories. A critical, or red, violation is considered a lapse that poses an immediate threat to human health and a minor, or blue, violation includes faulty record-keeping, maintenance, operation, supervision, equipment and other issues.

The state's pool inspection form lists 15 possible critical violations and 38 possible minor violations. One critical violation requires a follow-up inspection, as do a large number of minor violations found in one inspection.

State law requires swimming-pool operators to test pool water for proper disinfectant levels three times a day, with the first day's test before the pool opens to the public. County health inspectors make unannounced in-



Public health sanitarian Mark Boda checks the water for proper chemical levels during an unannounced inspection at Scarsdale's municipal pool on June 19. CARUCHA L. MEUSE/THE JOURNAL NEWS



From left, Leo and Rosemarly Walagorsky of Brewster, Kelvin Sagastume, 10, also of Brewster, and Linda Miller of New Fairfield, Conn., hit a ball to each other while cooling off in the Elks Lodge pool in Brewster on June 24. Last year, the pool at the lodge had no safety or sanitary violations, unlike many privately run pools. SETH HARRISON/THE JOURNAL NEWS

spectations at least once a year.

Privately operated pools' most common critical violations - those that posed an immediate risk to human health - included inadequate chlorine levels in pool water, improper supervision and dysfunctional filtration equipment. Chlorine is used to kill harmful bacteria such as E. coli, which could cause vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain if unsanitary pool water is accidentally swallowed.

State health law requires chlorine levels in pool water between 0.6 parts per million and 5 ppm. If the water's pH level is 7.8 or above, the

chlorine level must be 1.5 ppm or above.

A pH level is a measure of acidity or alkalinity. Pool water's pH level must fall between 7.2 and 8.2; pure water's pH level is 6.8 at 99 degrees Fahrenheit.

It's not always easy keeping chlorine at the legal levels, said Joan Neuendorf, aquatic director for the Town of Clarkstown. Last year the town's Germonds pool complex in West Nyack received two critical violations for low chlorine levels in the main and diving pools.

"It's just so common because the outdoor pools are large bodies of water. There's a lot of factors we

can't control and the big factor is weather. Temperature, sunlight, humidity - all that affects the level of chlorine," said Neuendorf. "It's not an exact science and if it was nobody would have (low-chlorine) violations."

With temperatures nearing 90, Dwayne Brown was understanding - though disappointed - that the kiddie pool at Germonds was closed when he first arrived June 26 due to elevated chlorine levels.

"I'd rather wait an hour and a half than (have) my daughters coming home with some skin disease," said Brown, 38, of New City, who did not know the reason for the closing.

"If we get to a pool and there's zero chlorine, that's closed until the next day."

PETER DELUCIA,
assistant commissioner of health, Westchester's Bureau of Public Health Protection

Then, later that day staffers following health protocols forced everyone out of a bigger pool at the facility after it was contaminated with apparent human feces. The pool reopened more than an hour later after the waste was removed and the chlorine level was raised, said Neuendorf.

The spray pool at Saxon Woods Park in White Plains was one of two public pools in Westchester that had a critical violation last year for low chlorine. At the time, park employees told the inspector that a chlorine pump with electrical problems was repaired; the pool was closed until 12:30 p.m. that day, when the chlorine level returned to legal levels, according to county records.

Mount Vernon resident Louise Silverman was one of the few people who took to the water at Saxon Woods Pool at Westchester County's Senior Pool Party and barbecue last

month.

Silverman, 62, a retired teacher, was visiting Saxon Woods for the first time and said she found the pool to be very clean, though the water was a bit chilly.

"I don't see anything that would make me think it's not in good shape," said Silverman. She theorized swimmers have to be reasonable about the cleanliness they expect from a public-pool experience: "Nothing is 100 percent - as long as they do the best they can do. I'm impressed right now."

Training is key

The Brewster Elks Lodge is a private pool that had no safety or sanitary violations last year. Bill Miller, co-chair of the club's pool committee, said volunteers and well-trained lifeguards ensured compliance.

Laura Snyder, 30, said she used the Elks Lodge's pool her whole life and she also frequented Tonetta Lake in Brewster until a water contamination issue there scared her off. Now she only comes to the Elks Lodge's pool because of its strict rules.

"They don't even allow water squirters here," said Snyder, who with her children attended the lodge's annual pool party for about 150 Putnam senior citizens.

The federal Centers for Disease Control's website notes that in the past two decades there has been a substantial increase in the number of recreational water illness outbreaks.

The CDC also noted a 2008 study of four states, including New York, that found municipal pools accounted for 9.6 percent of pool closings for serious violations, with apartment buildings representing 12.4 percent of closings.

John Partelow, president of Acqua Pro Inc. in Ossining, which services private pools, said some violations are due to poor staffing.

"Usually they hire an inexperienced lifeguard and they don't monitor (chlorine pumps) or don't know how to use the tests," Partelow said.

Health officials noted that if a lifeguard is the only one on duty and is also charged with performing the chemical tests, he or she is required to clear the swimmers out of the water before doing the testing.

"I'd rather wait an hour and a half than (have) my daughters coming home with some skin disease."

DWAYNE BROWN, New City resident