

Saving Energy in the Backyard

Pool pros seize opportunity to make outdoor living spaces energy efficient



Photo: Underwater Pool Masters

JUST LIKE AIR CONDITIONERS, REFRIGERATORS, LED LIGHTS and home automation, energy-efficient pool pumps can significantly lower a home's energy usage. According to the EPA's ENERGY STAR website, traditional single-speed pool pumps could be the home's second largest energy user for homes with in-ground swimming pools. With new DOE legislation on pool pumps going into effect in 2021, pool professionals should begin to educate pool owners about how variable-speed pool pumps can save on energy usage and reduce the carbon footprint of outdoor living spaces.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Dan Lenz and Julie Kazdin are members of the PHTA's National Pool and Spa Service Council, having worked with and educated service professionals throughout the country.

"This is an opportunity for our industry to elevate itself by proactively tailoring our businesses to offer energy-efficient solutions in the pool pump room and in all the products we offer, from lighting and equipment to pool covers, and automation," Kazdin says.

Homeowners already understand the benefits of energy-efficient water heaters, air conditioners, washers, dryers and dishwashers, so it's not a stretch to explain that the same ENERGY STAR rating of energy efficient equipment is also available for pools.

Lenz explains that both the DOE legislation and rebates from local utilities validate what pool professionals tell the consumer. "We tell them, 'Hey, this variable-speed pump is going to save you money and ComEd is even going to pay you to get that power off their grid,'" Lenz says. This way, he adds, "It's not just the pool guy telling them — but the utility company validating that same information."

Each area of the country has different constraints and regulations. Kazdin was recently teaching in Florida and heard service professionals say that, when pools are open year-round, it's harder to find time to bring them to code or upgrade their energy efficiency. She says pool professionals tend to wait until something doesn't work before looking to upgrade a piece of equipment. "This is very different from those markets where pools are opened and closed," she says, "because we have the opportunity to proactively evaluate the pool's equipment and recommend energy-efficient equipment."

In states like California and Arizona where pools also remain open year-round, knowledge of energy-efficient appliances and rebates from local utilities has made consumers aware of their benefits. Jose Garcia, owner of Barefoot Pools in Phoenix, says consumers know an investment in an energy-efficient pump will pay off eventually. "And in the meantime, the other benefits of the pump, such as its quiet operation, make it easier to sell than I initially expected," he says.

Erik Johnson, service manager at Underwater Pool Masters in West Boylston, Massachusetts, has installed three variable-speed pool pumps in his retail store to illustrate how quietly the pumps run. "Once they see we can easily carry on a conversation while standing in front of three operating pumps, it's much easier to sell them on the energy efficiency and electrical savings of the product, even for our season — which is sometimes only two to three months long."

Johnson says he often hears customers complain about their summer electrical bills increasing by \$100 a

month once they open their pool, which he uses as a way to introduce the variable-speed pump. He says reducing electrical costs pique their interest, “then I bring up the DOE legislation, and they are sold.”

Michael Berggren, owner of Berggren’s Backyard Oasis Pool Construction & Service in Wenatchee, Washington, says consumers in his area understand the benefits of doing everything they can to make their homes energy efficient. “They want to do their part to be eco-friendly,” Berggren says, “and the added benefit of the quieter operation makes their outdoor living space more enjoyable.”

TAKE ACTION

The pool industry, like the home building and remodeling industry, can help reduce the carbon footprint of homes. According to the EPA’s ENERGY STAR website, if every pool pump in the U.S were ENERGY STAR certified, families could save \$770 million in energy costs every year and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equal to those of more than 1 million cars. This is information that needs to be passed along to pool owners.

The ENERGY STAR ratings on variable-speed pool pumps follow in the footsteps of other household appliances by decreasing energy consumption and ultimately decreasing carbon emissions.

Berggren’s company is already changing out single-speed pumps for variable-speed pumps, sharing with customers that variable speed pumps will improve water quality while reducing energy consumption. Lenz has started sending targeted emails with upgrade quotes for single-speed pool pumps. Lenz says his emails have subject lines like ‘Save money running your pool’ and ‘Did you know that a variable-speed pool pump could save you \$100s on your electrical bill?’

Similarly, Kazdin will be sending upgrade quotes that include energy efficient pool pumps. “We will then direct our customers to the Pentair online cost-calculator,” she says, “and explain the significant rebates from our local utilities that will make the investment less sizeable.”

Kazdin’s local electric company offers a \$600 rebate to consumers who change to a variable-speed pump, and installers receive an additional \$150 rebate. Her company helps our customers fill out the rebate paperwork and passes along its installer rebate to the customer as well.

BE SMART, SELL SMART

Kazdin advises pool professionals to seek out education about efficiency codes and laws — “not only from manufacturers and distributors in your area, which are great resources” — but also from

local PHTA chapters, local Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis Clubs and other business organizations, Kazdin says.

Lenz stresses the need to avoid misinformation, urging the industry to use Facebook groups to direct pool professionals to valid resources. “Webinars, online resources, listing of rebates by state need to be shared and easily accessible,” he says. “The industry needs to collaborate to ensure information is valid and helpful.” ■



Photos:
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