INSIDE: ANNUAL STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

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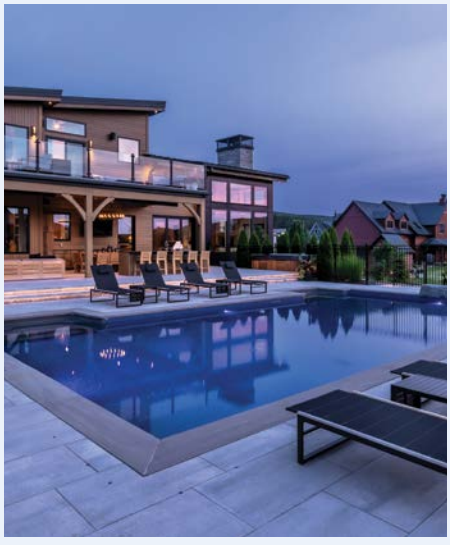

A fully integrated backyard by Pool Craft of Richmond Hill, Ont., features a 6- x 12-m (20- x 40-ft) pool, armour stone, expansive patios, and fire-water elements, demonstrating co-ordinated design, precise sequencing, and seamless transitions across the entire outdoor environment.

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PHOTO BY CAMERON STREET VISUAL STORYTELLING/ COURTESY POOL CRAFT

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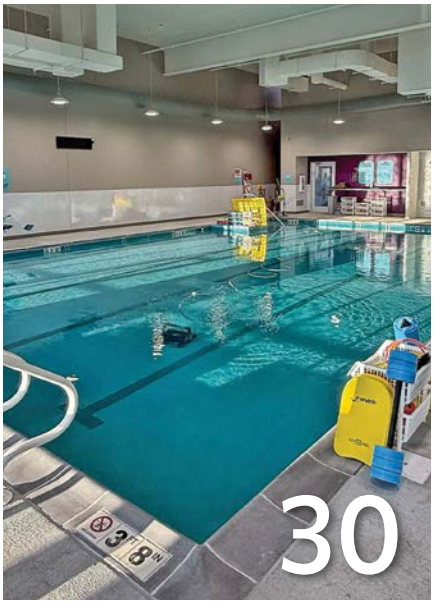

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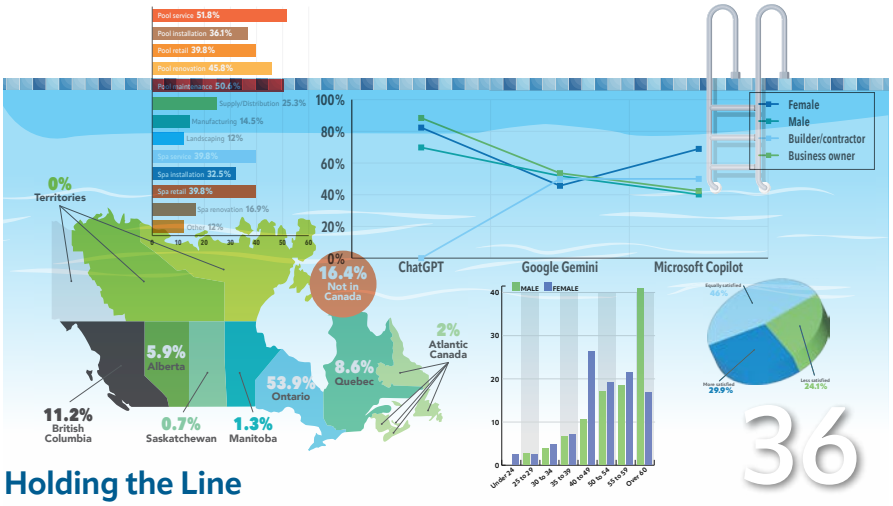

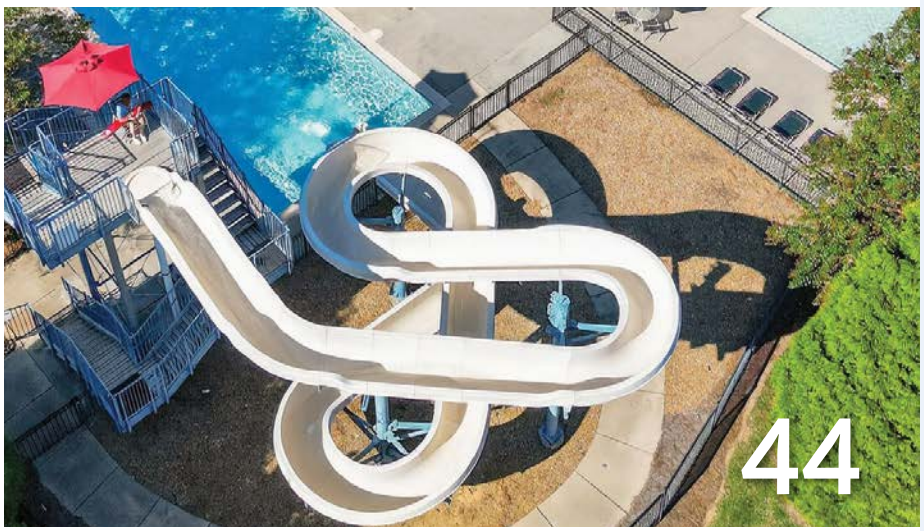

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Rates

Canada 1 year: $49.00 (incl. taxes)
U.S. 1 year: $77.00 US
Foreign 1 year: $98.00 US

Publications Mail Agreement #40663030

Postmaster: Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: Kenilworth Media Inc. 30 Leek Crescent, Suite 201, Richmond Hill, ON, L4B 4N4 Tel: (905) 771-7333; Fax: (905) 771-7336

Pool & Spa Marketing (ISSN 0711-2998) is published seven times a year, including an annual directory, by Kenilworth Media Inc., 30 Leek Crescent, Suite 201, Richmond Hill, ON, L4B 4N4.

Printed in Canada

Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada
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The Industry, by the Numbers

Across Canada, installations are beginning, service schedules are filling, and early-season demand is starting to take shape. Winter uncertainty gives way to clearer signals on demand and performance.

This issue reflects that shift, anchored by two of the industry's most closely watched benchmarks: our annual State of the Industry report and Salary Survey results.

This year's permit data points to a market finding its footing. Residential pool permits reached 14,149 in 2025, a 23.3 per cent increase over the previous year, suggesting renewed construction momentum following the post-pandemic adjustment. The data also points to a shift toward a more stable baseline. For builders and retailers, that shift brings both opportunity and discipline, as demand remains strong but less forgiving.

The Salary Survey tells a complementary story—one of cautious optimism shaped by real pressures. Confidence remains steady, but profitability and wage growth are constrained. As the report notes, the industry is "balancing opportunity amid ongoing operational and economic pressures."

Taken together, these reports highlight a market that is active, engaged, and resilient, but also more deliberate in how it operates. This theme carries through the features in this issue.

In Co-ordinating a Complex Backyard Build (p. 18), the importance of early planning, sequencing, and co-ordination is in sharp focus. As the article demonstrates, projects depend on aligning structural, mechanical, and landscape systems, ensuring that installations perform as intended from day one.

In Scaling Without Compromise (p. 30), the move toward centralized operations speaks to the need for consistency at scale. As Craig Kinney explains, "Our pools and the environments they operate in are critical to our business," underscoring how reliability, response time, and standardized service are becoming non-negotiable in multifacility environments.

Operational discipline is also at the core of Proactive Pools, Predictable Costs (p. 44), which challenges the long-standing perception that safety and budget are competing priorities. Instead, the article reframes the conversation: "Safety is not a line item; it is an operating system." In a season where time and resources are limited, that mindset shift becomes increasingly relevant.

Meanwhile, evolving customer expectations continue to influence product selection and system design. In Beyond Summer (p. 24), pool heating is framed as a seasonal add-on and a core component of extending pool use.

Across all of these stories, a consistent pattern emerges. The industry is not slowing down—but it is becoming more precise. Decisions around systems, staffing, safety, and service are being made with greater intention, driven by both data and experience.

April is where those decisions begin to play out.

Jason Cramp
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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State of the Industry

Pool Permits Rise in 2025; Market Stabilizes After the Pandemic Boom

Editor's note: This is our 47th annual report on the state of the Canadian pool industry, including statistical information and market analysis. The information is based on building permit records for pools, with an overview of new pool permits across Canada and in Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs). National totals include permits issued across all municipalities. CMA totals represent permits issued only within major urban centres and therefore represent a subset of the national totals.

By Jason Cramp

PHOTO ©FEVERPITCHED/GETTYIMAGES

The Canadian residential pool industry recorded a noticeable increase in permit activity in 2025, reflecting renewed construction momentum following the market adjustment that occurred after the pandemic-era surge in backyard investment.

Nationwide, 14,149 pool permits were issued in 2025, up from 11,471 in 2024, representing a 23.3 per cent year-over-year increase.

Although demand remains below the exceptional levels recorded during the height of the pandemic boom, the latest permit data suggests the industry may be entering a period of more stable growth after several years of volatility.

This increase occurred despite a construction environment shaped by several broader economic pressures. Elevated borrowing costs, continued inflation in construction materials, and ongoing labour shortages across the skilled trades have created challenges across much of the residential construction sector. In addition, renewed trade tensions and the potential for U.S. tariffs affecting certain construction materials have contributed to uncertainty within parts of the building industry.

Even with these pressures influencing the broader construction market, residential pool permits increased in 2025, suggesting homeowners continue to prioritize outdoor living investments. Backyard improvements—including pools—remain among the most visible ways households invest in their homes and lifestyles.

Data note

This report uses two datasets derived from building permit records.

- National totals include pool permits issued across all municipalities in Canada.
- Census metropolitan area (CMA) totals include permits issued only within CMAs (Canada's largest urban centres).

CMA figures, therefore, represent a subset of national permits and are used to illustrate urban construction trends.

Viewed within a longer historical context, the Canadian pool industry over the past decade can be understood in three distinct phases: a period of relative stability through much of the 2010s, an extraordinary expansion during the pandemic between 2020 and 2022, and a subsequent transition toward a more sustainable baseline beginning in 2023.

During the pandemic years, residential pool construction experienced a once-in-a-generation surge. Stay-at-home living patterns, travel restrictions, and increased discretionary spending on outdoor spaces drove unprecedented demand for backyard improvements across much of North America.

In many markets, pool builders experienced record installation volumes as homeowners accelerated renovation projects that might otherwise have occurred gradually over several years.

As pandemic conditions eased, permit activity across Canada began to moderate from those historic peaks. This shift does not necessarily indicate declining interest in residential pools; rather, it reflects a normalization of demand following a period of unusually strong construction activity.

In several Ontario markets—including London, Barrie, Hamilton, and Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo—permit activity rose far above historical averages during the pandemic years. The data suggests a portion of the demand that would normally have occurred gradually over several years was instead compressed into a much shorter period, effectively pulling forward future construction activity.

As a result, permit totals in some Ontario markets have moderated in the years since the pandemic peak, not necessarily because demand has disappeared, but because many projects that might otherwise have occurred later were completed earlier during the pandemic surge.

Even after this adjustment, the Canadian pool industry continues to operate at construction levels that exceed those of much of the previous decade.

National overview

Pool permit registrations increased in 2025 compared with the previous year, signalling renewed activity as the Canadian pool industry continues to adjust after the extraordinary expansion during the pandemic years.

Historically, residential pool construction has sometimes continued to grow even when broader economic indicators weaken. Pools often act as discretionary lifestyle investments linked to homeownership and outdoor living, helping demand persist even during periods of economic uncertainty.

Monthly permit registrations between January and April in the last 10 years						
Year	January	February	March	April	Total	Rank
2025	252	340	815	1,555	2,962	4
2024	229	370	724	1,412	2,735	6
2023	268	395	928	1,438	3,029	3
2022	466	706	1,501	2,176	4,849	2
2021	497	1,032	2,442	3,647	7,618	1
2020	164	310	537	1,093	2,104	10
2019	145	182	640	1,748	2,715	7
2018	102	179	622	1,396	2,299	9
2017	136	248	798	1,624	2,806	5
2016	96	184	567	1,637	2,504	8
	Highest					
	Lowest					

While the latest increase shows improving market momentum, the broader trend still reflects the industry's shift from an overheated pandemic market towards a more sustainable baseline.

Between 2020 and 2022, the Canadian pool industry experienced a once-in-a-generation expansion driven by stay-at-home living and discretionary spending on outdoor spaces. Residential pool construction surged across many parts of the country as homeowners invested heavily in backyard amenities.

Since then, the industry has been transitioning from an overheated pandemic market to a more sustainable baseline. Even with the correction that followed those peak years, Canada continues to build more residential pools than it did through much of the 2010s, highlighting the lasting influence of pandemic-era backyard investment.

In many ways, the pandemic expansion accelerated a trend that was already forming in the late 2010s, when permit activity was slowly rising across various Canadian markets.

Seasonality

Pool permits continue to demonstrate the highly seasonal nature of residential pool construction in Canada.

Permit activity typically begins slowly during winter months, accelerates through early spring, and reaches peak construction levels between May and August, when the majority of installations occur.

This compressed construction window shapes many operational realities for pool builders. Labour planning, equipment logistics, installation scheduling, and cash flow are all concentrated within a relatively short portion of the year.

Early-season permit activity can also serve as an indicator of construction momentum heading into the installation season. Over many years, stronger permit registrations between January and April have preceded stronger annual permit totals, suggesting that early planning activity often reflects homeowner confidence as the spring construction period approaches.

Weather conditions may also help explain some of the seasonal permit activity recorded in 2025. According to Environment and Climate Change Canada, the winter of 2024–2025 ranked as the fifth warmest on record, with national temperatures approximately 3.7 C (38.6 F) above the historical average. Spring temperatures also remained above normal, averaging about 1.3 C (34.3 F) above the long-term baseline, while the summer of 2025 ranked as the 11th warmest since national records began in 1948. Warmer winter and spring conditions can allow planning and permitting activity to begin earlier in the year, while periods of heavy precipitation or storms during the summer construction season can disrupt installation schedules in some markets.[2]

Weather variability continues to affect the timing of pool construction across Canada, often causing permit activity to shift earlier or later within the limited spring and summer construction period. Despite annual variations in permit totals, this seasonal pattern has stayed consistent throughout the decade.

Urban concentration

Pool permit activity in Canada has become increasingly concentrated in major metropolitan markets.

While national totals include permits issued across all municipalities, a significant portion of construction activity occurs within Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs).

CMA permit totals increased from 8,595 permits in 2024 to 10,022 permits in 2025, reflecting continued growth in pool construction activity within Canada's largest urban regions.

Over the past decade, many of the highest permit totals have consistently originated from metropolitan markets such as:

- Montreal
- Quebec City
- Sherbrooke
- Toronto
- Ottawa

Even during the pandemic, much of the strongest growth occurred in major population centres rather than in rural areas.

This pattern suggests demand for residential pools is increasingly tied to urban backyard living, where smaller lot sizes and higher population density may encourage homeowners to invest in private outdoor recreation spaces.

Regional data

National permit totals give a broad view of the market, but regional comparisons show how unevenly pool construction is spread across Canada.

Large metropolitan areas tend to generate steady permit activity year after year. At the same time, smaller markets often experience more fluctuations because minor changes in the number of projects can lead to significant percentage shifts.

This pattern is reflected in the year-over-year changes recorded across several CMAs in 2025.

Regional permit data in 2025 shows that construction activity remained heavily concentrated in eastern Canada, particularly in Quebec. Together, Atlantic Canada and Quebec accounted for the majority of residential pool permits issued nationwide, reflecting the continued strength of Quebec's pool market and steady activity across several Atlantic municipalities.

Year	Start of year/ Early Spring (total permits)	Mid-spring/ late summer (total permits)	Fall/Winter (total permits)
2025	2,962	8,327	2,860
2024	2,735	6,527	2,209
Increase/Decrease	+227	+1,800	+651
Per cent change	+8.3%	+27.5%	29.5%

Due largely to population size and housing density, Ontario and Quebec remain the country's largest regions for residential pool installations and, as a result, tend to experience the most noticeable fluctuations in permit activity from year to year. In 2025, Quebec recorded a significant year-over-year increase in pool permits, while Ontario experienced a modest decline as several metropolitan markets adjusted following the surge in residential pool construction during the pandemic years.

Largest Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) increases in pool permits in 2025			
Region	2024	2025	(+) Change
Montreal	4,311	5,316	1,005
Quebec	988	1,186	198
Sherbrooke	496	557	61
Drummondville	290	348	58
Trois-Rivieres	183	219	36

Largest Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) decreases in pool permits in 2025			
Region	2024	2025	(-) Change
Kelowna	178	151	27
London	182	157	25
Hamilton	99	80	19
Greater Sudbury	25	9	16
Calgary	23	9	14

Across Canada's CMAs, permit activity also reflected this uneven regional distribution. Several municipalities in Quebec and Atlantic Canada recorded notable increases in 2025, while some markets in Ontario and western Canada experienced smaller changes in permit activity compared with the previous year.

The data also reinforces the growing concentration of residential pool construction within major metropolitan areas. Many of the largest year-over-year increases occurred in CMAs such as Quebec City, Sherbrooke, and Trois-Rivières. At the same time, several Ontario cities recorded moderate declines as construction levels stabilized after the pandemic boom.

(See the chart "Building Permits Issued for Pools in Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) 2015–2025" on page 14 for details on specific municipalities.)

Atlantic Canada

Atlantic Canada pool permits continue to represent a relatively small share of national construction activity, but several municipalities recorded notable year-over-year increases in 2025.

Across the region, Newfoundland and Labrador recorded 36 permits in 2025, up from 20 in 2024, while Nova Scotia increased from 23 to 47 permits, and New Brunswick rose from 78 to 111 permits.

Several Atlantic cities experienced particularly strong increases. St. John's recorded 34 permits in 2025 compared with 17 in 2024, while Fredericton increased from 22 permits to 47 permits year over year.

Although total permit volumes remain smaller than those of Canada's largest provinces, these increases suggest stronger residential pool construction activity across several Atlantic municipalities in 2025.

Quebec

Quebec pool permits continue to dominate the Canadian residential pool market. In 2025, the province issued 11,594 pool permits, up from 8,850 in 2024. This represents an increase of 2,744 permits. The change equals approximately 31 per cent year-over-year.

Several Quebec metropolitan areas recorded noticeable increases in permit activity. Quebec City increased from 988 permits in 2024 to 1,186 permits in 2025, while Sherbrooke rose from 496 permits to 557 permits, and Trois-Rivières increased from 183 permits to 219 permits.

Montreal remained the largest individual market in the country with 5,316 permits in 2025, up from 4,311 in 2024, demonstrating the continued strength of the province's largest urban pool construction market.

These patterns reinforce Quebec's position as the central driver of residential pool construction in Canada.

Quebec has consistently led the country in residential pool construction for many years, accounting for the majority of permits issued nationwide. Several factors may help explain the province's sustained dominance, including fencing laws, a strong backyard pool culture, urban density patterns, and municipal permitting requirements that may more reliably reflect installations in official statistics.

Ontario

Ontario pool permits remain the second-largest provincial contributor to national pool construction activity. In 2025, the province issued 1,667 pool permits, down from 1,784 in 2024, representing a decrease of 117 permits, or 6.6 per cent year over year.

Several municipalities recorded lower permit activity compared with the previous year. London declined from 182 permits in 2024 to 157 in 2025, while Hamilton decreased from 99 to 80, and Windsor declined from 253 to 240.

Ontario's flattening permit activity after 2022 appears to reflect a demand acceleration effect during the pandemic. Several metropolitan markets—including London, Barrie, Hamilton, and Kitchener–

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Building permits issued for pools in Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) (2015-2025)											
Region	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Canada	10,698	13,054	12,067	12,224	12,685	18,372	22,518	16,408	12,729	11,471	14,149
Abbotsford	6	10	5	10	15	15	22	24	17	14	9
Barrie	163	248	118	94	66	106	130	78	31	20	42
Belleville	—	—	4	17	10	40	53	57	34	28	18
Brantford	59	30	39	47	19	36	46	64	35	17	19
Calgary	36	31	39	46	13	58	77	70	46	23	9
Chilliwack	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Drummondville	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	363	290	348
Edmonton	38	31	77	27	26	34	34	53	7	31	37
Fredericton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	26	22	47
Guelph	42	245	76	86	65	80	74	68	27	23	13
Halifax	29	36	224	55	158	100	3	3	—	—	—
Hamilton	187	414	494	506	271	228	377	316	155	99	80
Kamloops	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	27	12	18
Kelowna	243	180	221	233	192	270	409	257	202	178	151
Kingston	36	51	36	45	53	67	100	133	63	47	67
Kitchener/Cambridge/ Waterloo	86	127	146	126	170	222	393	238	78	54	57
Lethbridge	—	—	38	33	36	50	42	12	34	21	35
London	144	256	259	263	299	423	549	383	237	182	157
Moncton	13	25	21	27	33	79	61	35	31	18	20
Montreal	4,175	4,730	4,272	4,302	4,478	6,955	8,294	5,096	4,311	4,311	5,316
Nanaimo	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	8	12
Oshawa	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ottawa/Hull/Gatineau	170	367	180	200	584	952	1,047	903	592	560	579
Peterborough	46	52	34	39	37	42	57	77	39	29	31
Quebec	463	598	612	753	793	1320	1406	1,251	1,008	988	1,186
Regina	11	5	10	4	1	8	19	24	12	7	16
Saguenay	67	56	47	50	60	80	98	93	49	132	132
St Catharines/Niagara	179	221	268	221	187	219	315	260	148	125	132
Saint John	15	18	33	8	16	36	51	45	20	13	25
St John's	23	97	11	10	13	30	8	12	85	17	34
Saskatoon	11	9	8	11	7	15	19	25	27	18	14
Sherbrooke	386	481	409	408	457	605	661	597	458	496	557
Sudbury	89	159	108	121	107	139	119	55	68	25	9
Thunder Bay	—	—	—	—	—	—	21	—	—	—	2
Toronto	279	311	360	283	308	395	501	330	189	135	144
Trois-Rivières	134	181	158	178	196	276	289	273	214	183	219
Vancouver	171	226	207	187	176	149	258	223	198	109	113
Victoria	13	9	6	8	5	12	23	20	12	8	9
Windsor	106	134	191	238	215	232	281	331	278	253	240
Winnipeg	125	101	111	140	134	189	314	166	128	99	125
Total major urban area permits	7,545	9,439	8,824	8,776	9,253	13,462	16,151	11,572	8,866	8,595	10,022

Cambridge–Waterloo—experienced unusually large increases in permit activity between 2020 and 2022, as residential construction surged amid homeowners' investment in backyard living spaces.

In many of these cities, permit activity during the pandemic rose far above historical averages. The dataset suggests that a portion of the demand that would normally have occurred gradually over several years was instead compressed into a shorter window, as homeowners accelerated renovation and pool construction projects.

As a result, permit activity in Ontario has moderated in the years since the pandemic peak, not necessarily because demand disappeared, but because some future projects were effectively built earlier than expected.

Prairies

Prairie province pool permits remain comparatively modest relative to Canada's largest markets but showed several year-over-year increases in 2025.

Manitoba recorded 153 permits in 2025, up from 123 in 2024, while Saskatchewan increased from 26 to 31 year over year. Alberta recorded 96 permits in 2025, down from 106 in 2024.

In Manitoba, Winnipeg increased from 99 permits in 2024 to 125 in 2025, ranking among the largest increases among Prairie metropolitan areas.

In Saskatchewan, Regina increased from seven to 16 permits, while Saskatoon recorded 14 permits, down from 18 the previous year, reflecting the region's typical year-to-year variability.

Since total permit volumes remain relatively small, even modest changes in project activity can produce noticeable shifts in annual totals across the Prairie provinces.

British Columbia

British Columbia pool permits continue to represent an important regional market within the national industry.

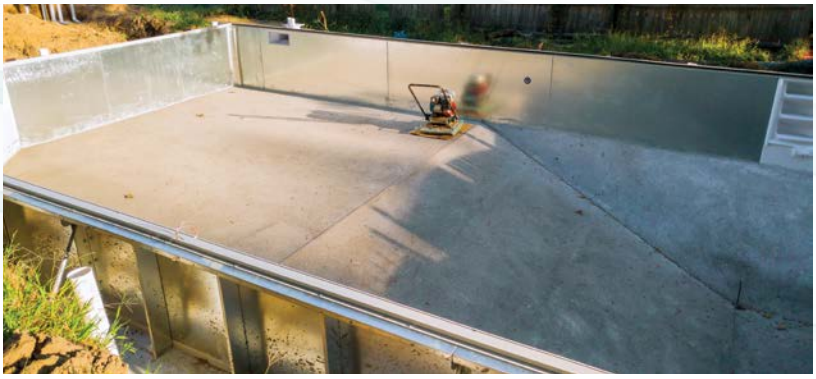
The province recorded 409 permits in 2025, down from 454 in 2024, a decline of 45 permits year over year.

Several municipalities recorded noticeable changes in permit activity. Kelowna declined from 178 permits in 2024 to 151 in 2025, while Kamloops increased from 12 to 18.

Vancouver, one of the province's largest markets, recorded 113 permits in 2025, up from 109 in 2024, reflecting relatively stable construction activity in the metropolitan area.

Although overall provincial permit totals declined slightly, several municipalities continued to show steady residential pool construction activity.

2025 percentage of inground pool permits issued (by Census Metropolitan Areas [CMAs])	
Region	Percentage
Atlantic	1.3
Quebec	82.3
Ontario	10.9
Prairies	2.4
British Columbia	3.1



Long-term perspective

Viewed over the past decade, the Canadian pool industry can be understood in three distinct phases:

- Relative stability through much of the 2010s
- Extraordinary expansion between 2020 and 2022
- A transition toward a more sustainable baseline beginning in 2023

Historically, the Canadian pool industry has tended to experience relatively short growth cycles. Earlier permit data show that the longest sustained streak of year-over-year permit growth in the past two decades has been three consecutive years, indicating the market generally expands in bursts rather than through extended periods of uninterrupted growth.

The increase recorded in 2025 suggests the industry may be entering a period of steadier growth following the post-pandemic adjustment. Although construction levels are no longer at the exceptional pace seen during the pandemic surge, demand remains strong relative to earlier years. Even after declining from those peak levels, Canada continues to build more residential pools than it did through much of the previous decade.

At the same time, the data highlights a market increasingly shaped by several structural forces:

- urban residential living patterns
- strong seasonal construction cycles
- growing concentration of activity in major metropolitan regions

These factors are likely to remain defining characteristics of the Canadian residential pool market in the years ahead.

Looking forward, broader economic and geopolitical developments may also influence construction activity heading into the 2026 season. Continued uncertainty surrounding potential U.S. tariffs on certain construction materials could affect equipment pricing and supply chains across the pool industry. At the same time, geopolitical tensions and conflict in the Middle East—including the ongoing situation involving Iran—have contributed to volatility in global oil markets, which can translate into higher gasoline and transportation costs. Rising fuel costs can affect multiple aspects of pool construction, including material delivery, service travel, and overall project expenses.

Taken together, the permit data suggest the Canadian pool industry is entering a period of stabilization after several years of extraordinary volatility. While construction levels have moderated from the unprecedented surge during the pandemic boom, permit totals remain elevated compared with much of the previous decade. As the market continues to normalize, the industry appears increasingly influenced by seasonal construction dynamics, the growing concentration of activity in urban markets, and the sustained strength of Quebec's residential pool sector—while also navigating the broader economic uncertainties that may shape the market in the years ahead.

Notes

[1] Refer to Statistics Canada. Table 34-10-0292-01 Building permits, by type of structure and type of work (x 1,000). For more details, visit 150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3410029201

[2] See Environment and Climate Change Canada. Canadian Climate Trends and Variations Bulletins: Winter 2024–2025, Spring 2025, and Summer 2025. For more, visit canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/science-research-data/climate-trends-variability.html

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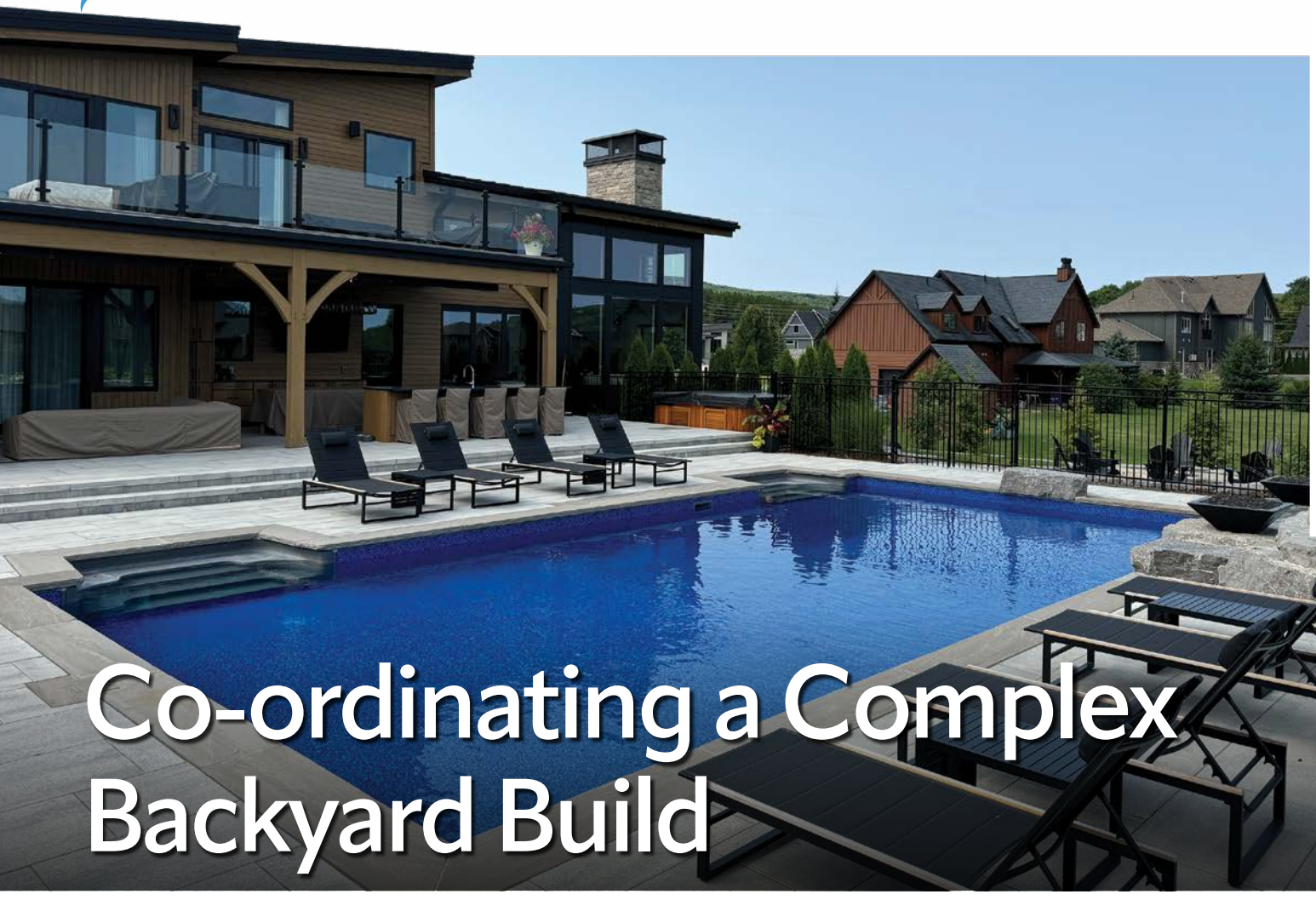


Co-ordinating a Complex Backyard Build

How planning and sequencing shaped a large residential project

By Jason Mitchell

PHOTOS BY CAMERON STREET VISUAL STORYTELLING/ COURTESY POOL CRAFT

This mountain meadow project shows how careful planning, material co-ordination, and construction sequencing can ensure the successful completion of a large-scale residential pool and landscape installation. For pool professionals, the project offers insight into integrating water features, fire elements, and extensive hardscape within a single residential setting.

Project overview

Located in Collingwood, Ont., this project involved building a custom inground pool along with a fully integrated outdoor space. Pool Craft of Richmond Hill, Ont installed the pool.

At the centre of the project is a 6 x 12 m (20 x 40 ft) rectangular pool. It features two fibreglass step units positioned at opposite ends, providing multiple entry points and enhancing circulation within the space. A custom waterfall with integrated fire bowls serves as a focal point, but adds extra mechanical and coordination considerations.

The scope of work went well beyond just the pool. About 279 m² (3,000 sf) of patio area, large armour stone features, a substantial water element, and a dedicated firepit zone were included in the design. Pathways, lighting, fencing, and planting added finishing touches, creating visual and functional unity among the different outdoor areas.

From a professional perspective, the project is noteworthy for both its scale and the integration of multiple systems—structural, hydraulic, electrical, and landscape—into a single, well-planned build.

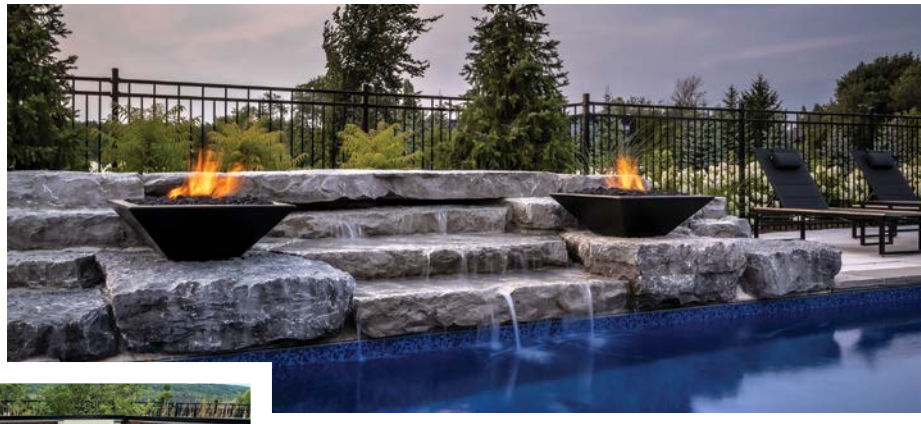
The project included about 279 m² (3,000 sf) of patio area, large armour stone features, and a fully integrated outdoor space.

Existing conditions and constraints

While the site provided ample space, it also introduced several practical limitations that affected both design and construction.

Significant grade changes across the property required early attention to drainage planning, especially considering the amount of hardscape and stonework involved. Managing surface water flow was essential to preserving the pool structure and surrounding patios over time.

The use of large quantities of armour stone introduced additional structural considerations.



Top L to R: Patios, walkways, and gathering spaces were designed to function as a cohesive outdoor system with seamless transitions between areas.

Outdoor living areas are integrated with the pool layout, with co-ordinated elevations, finishes, and circulation zones enhancing usability and comfort.

Outdoor living areas were co-ordinated alongside the pool to ensure alignment of elevations, finishes, and circulation zones.

The custom water feature was positioned early in the design process to avoid conflicts during construction.

Mechanical systems were designed to support both pool operation and the additional demand from integrated water features.

Supporting heavy stone loads required careful subgrade preparation and consistent compaction, especially in areas where patios, retaining elements, and walkways meet. Soil conditions varied across the site, highlighting the need for ongoing evaluation during excavation rather than relying solely on assumptions made during the planning phase.

Access and logistics also required careful coordination. Delivering and placing hundreds of tonnes of stone in a suburban environment involved managing equipment staging, delivery schedules, and protecting existing site features.

Local permitting requirements—including pool safety barriers, gas and electrical inspections for fire features, and drainage compliance—added an extra layer of co-ordination. Regional climate conditions also affected the construction schedule, requiring consideration of seasonal weather patterns, frost conditions, and limited windows for certain phases of work.

Design approach

From the beginning, the design approach focused on clarity and co-ordination.

The rectangular pool shape was chosen not only for its clean look but also for its construction efficiency and the ease of adding steps at both the shallow and deep ends. The layout offers visual balance while serving swimmers of different ages and skill levels.

The waterfall and fire features were considered essential components rather than optional add-ons. Their placement, elevations, and service needs were determined early in the design process to prevent conflicts during construction.

Mechanical routing for water, gas, and electrical services was co-ordinated alongside the pool shell and equipment layout, reducing the need for major adjustments later.

Safety and usability were prioritized through clearly defined circulation zones, code-compliant fencing, and smooth transitions between pool decking and nearby patios. Collaboration between pool builders, landscape designers, and other trades ensured that elevations, finishes, and service routes were aligned before construction began.

Materials and systems selection

Material selection for the project balanced durability, constructability, and long-term performance.

The pool was built with a vinyl-lined system, providing flexibility in choosing finishes and a reliable method for large rectangular setups. The selected liner pattern enhanced the overall visual flow of the space while allowing for easy replacement in the future without causing structural issues.

Natural stone played a significant role throughout the project. Slate-grey coping was selected for its compatibility with the pool design. At the same time, surrounding patios used large-format interlocking pavers chosen for their structural stability, drainage performance, and ease of repair if future access is needed.

Hydraulic systems were designed to accommodate both the pool volume and the extra demand from the waterfall feature. Circulation layout focused on balanced flow and ease of maintenance.

Landscape lighting was incorporated across the site to promote safe navigation and increase usability during evening hours. Conduit routing was planned early to prevent conflicts with irrigation and drainage infrastructure.

Key takeaways for pool professionals

- Early collaboration between pool, landscape, and mechanical contractors can greatly reduce construction conflicts.
- Soil conditions should be checked regularly, especially when heavy stone elements are involved.
- Clear communication between trades helps keep the project on track and supports efficient sequencing.
- Proper drainage planning makes long-term maintenance easier and protects the surrounding hardscape.

Construction process and sequencing

Construction started with a detailed layout and excavation to establish reference elevations for the pool, patios, and stone features. Due to the scale of the hardscape installation, early accuracy was essential. Even minor elevation differences could have caused challenges throughout the site.

Pool wall panels were installed and secured, followed by base preparation for patios and armour stone installations.

The rectangular pool, surrounding patios, armour stone features, and dedicated gathering areas illustrate the scale and integration of the overall project.

Careful attention during liner placement ensured proper alignment with fittings and step units, reducing the need for post-fill adjustments. Mechanical systems were installed in parallel, enabling early pressure testing and inspection.

Stonework and hardscape installation was carried out in stages, working closely with pool construction to ensure access and protect finished surfaces.

Weather conditions required flexibility in scheduling, especially during heavy rain and snowfall, which are common in the area.

Throughout the process, consistent communication among trades helped identify potential conflicts early, enabling sequencing to be adjusted without compromising quality, safety, or project timelines.

Technical challenges and problem-solving

Integrating fire features within a water element presented some of the project's more complex technical challenges.

Gas and electrical services had to be routed securely while maintaining clear separation from pool plumbing and structural components—this required close coordination among all involved trades.

Soil variability beneath armour stone installations also prompted adjustments to foundation preparation in certain areas. Instead of relying on uniform assumptions, the team responded to site conditions as they arose, reinforcing base structures and modifying installation methods when needed.

Drainage co-ordination required further refinement during construction. Minor grade adjustments were made to ensure water was diverted away from the pool and hardscape areas, reducing the risk of saturation and long-term maintenance issues.

Backyard integration

A key measure of the project's success was how well the pool blended into the wider backyard setting.

Patios, walkways, and gathering spaces were designed to work as parts of a cohesive outdoor system, with matching levels and seamless transitions between areas.

Drainage strategies were integrated throughout both hardscape and landscaped areas, ensuring runoff was managed effectively without depending solely on the pool deck.

Lighting was co-ordinated across the site to enhance both esthetics and safety, with fixture placement aligned with circulation routes and main activity zones.

Plantings and grading further helped stabilize site edges, soften transitions between built elements, and protect the long-term integrity of the hardscape installations.

Final result

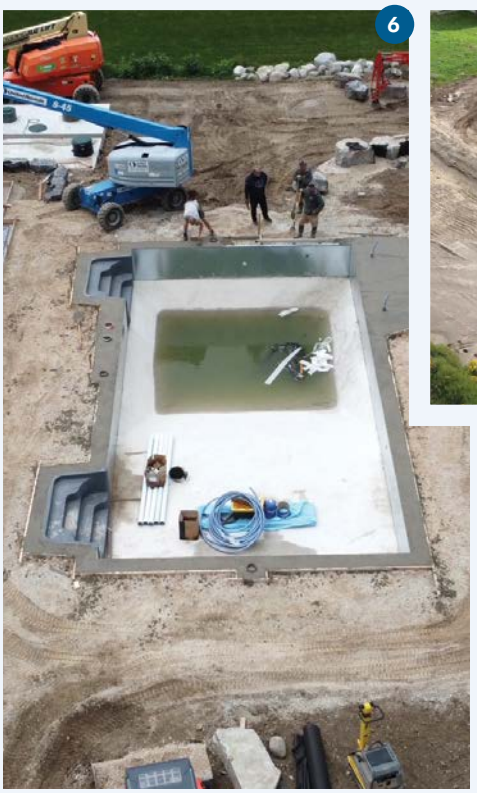
Following completion, the pool system performed as intended. Circulation and filtration systems met operational expectations, and the integrated water and fire features functioned reliably.

Client handover included detailed instructions on system operation and ongoing maintenance requirements. Seasonal considerations specific to the region and anticipated bather loads were also reviewed.

Providing clear guidance on care and operation helps reduce the likelihood of unnecessary service calls and supports the long-term performance of the installation.

With more than 20 years of experience in the industry, Jason Mitchell is the president of Pool Craft. This full-service pool company specializes in all aspects of pool planning, installation, and backyard design in Richmond Hill, Ont. Pool Craft is the parent company to Stone Craft, the landscape silo and Timber Craft, the carpentry silo. Mitchell can be reached via email at jason@poolcraft.ca.

Turning Raw Earth into Refined Outdoor Living



1. Pool wall panels and step units are set in place while mechanical systems are installed in parallel.

PHOTOS COURTESY POOL CRAFT

2. Excavation and base preparation establish elevations for the pool, patios, and surrounding features.

3. Underground plumbing and service lines are installed and co-ordinated before further construction progresses.

4. Structural bases are formed to support the pool shell and integrated water and fire features.

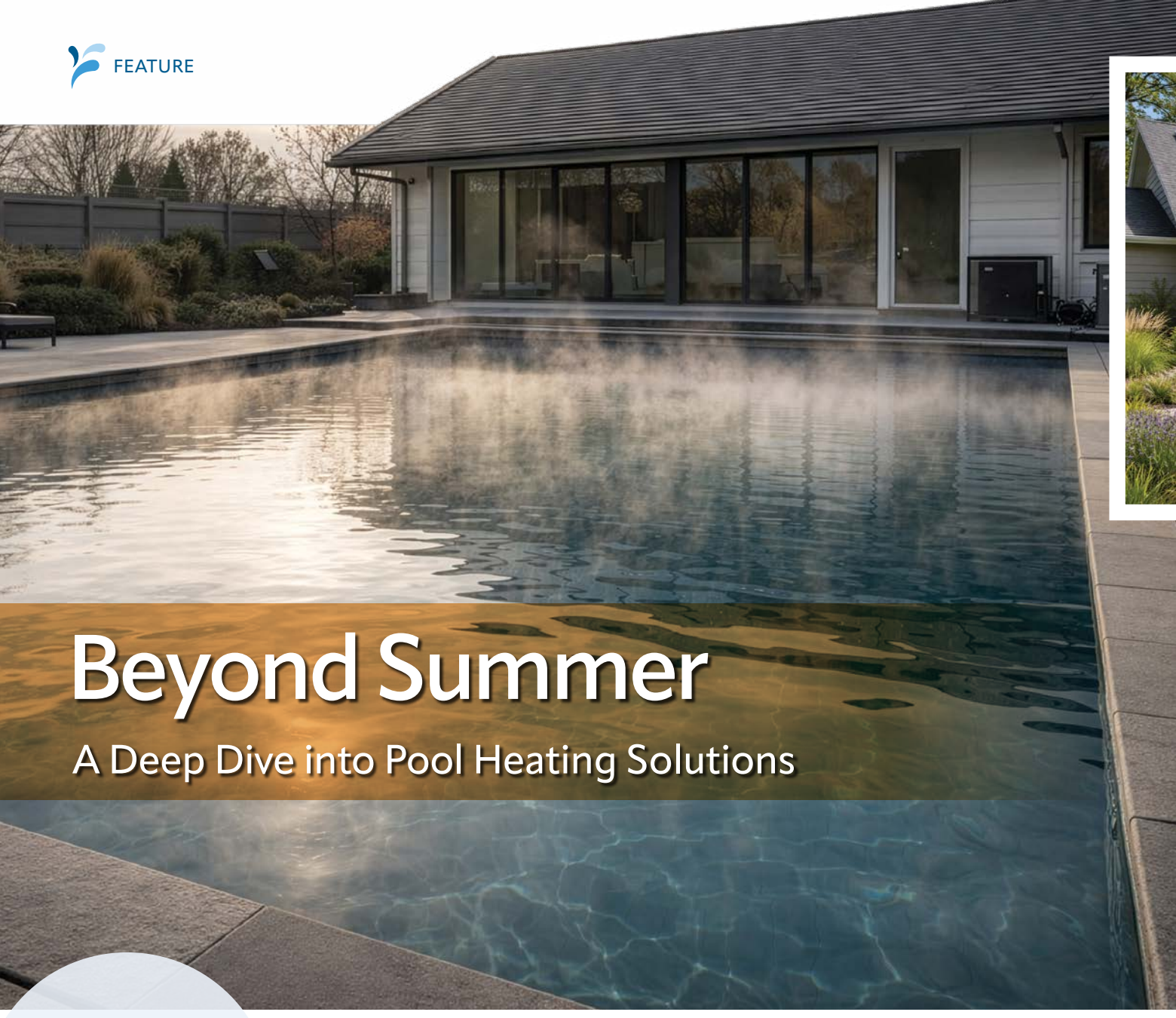
5. Water and fire features are installed with co-ordinated gas and electrical connections.

6. Patio areas are graded and prepared to support hardscape and armour stone installations.

7. Stonework and hardscape elements are installed in stages alongside ongoing pool construction.

8. Completed pool, water feature, and surrounding landscape come together as a fully integrated outdoor space.

PHOTO BY CAMERON STREET VISUAL STORYTELLING/ COURTESY POOL CRAFT



Beyond Summer

A Deep Dive into Pool Heating Solutions

By Farheen Sikandar

AI-GENERATED PHOTOS

Pool heaters are no longer just a winter essential. From cool spring openings to early mornings and late evenings throughout the season, they play a key role in extending pool use beyond peak summer conditions. To maximize comfort and usability, customers and facilities should understand the range of heaters and pumps available, enabling informed decisions that align with their operating needs.

This is where pool professionals take over. With their expertise and extensive knowledge of the latest technologies, advancements, and maintenance methods, they can guide customers in making a purchase that meets their winter pool-use needs.

This guide serves as a comprehensive resource for everything required to keep pools heated.

Types of heaters

The following outlines the primary types of pool heaters available and the characteristics that differentiate them.

Gas-fired heaters

Propane or natural gas heaters are the most common. They heat a pool fairly quickly and can maintain any desired temperature regardless of weather or climate. While operating costs can be higher depending on usage and fuel prices, they remain one of the most reliable and responsive heating options available.

System operation centres on circulating filtered water through a heat exchanger, where combustion-

Gas-fired pool heaters deliver fast, reliable heating in any climate by circulating water through a heat exchanger powered by propane or natural gas combustion.

generated heat is transferred efficiently back to the pool[1]—an approach that supports rapid temperature recovery and consistent output across varying conditions.

The U.S. Department of Energy (U.S. DOE) states, "Sizing a gas pool heater involves many factors. Basically, a heater is sized according to the surface area of the pool and the difference between the pool and the average air temperatures. Other factors also affect the heating load for outdoor pools, such as wind exposure, humidity levels, and cool night temperatures. Therefore, pools located in areas with higher average wind speeds at the pool surface, lower humidity, and cool nights will require a larger

Solar pool heaters harness sunlight through roof- or ground-mounted panels for a sustainable, long-lasting heating option, though performance depends on sun exposure and installation space.

PHOTO ©ANDY DEAN PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM

Heat pump heaters use ambient air to efficiently warm (or even cool) pool water, offering an eco-friendly solution best suited for temperatures above 10 C (50 F).

AI-GENERATED PHOTOS

Solar blankets and covers offer a budget-friendly way to retain heat and reduce energy loss, using sun exposure and insulation to naturally extend pool warmth.

heater. Gas pool heaters are rated by Btu (British thermal unit) output. Outputs range from 75,000 Btu to 450,000 Btu."[1]

Heat pump

For those living in warmer climates, a heat pump pool heater, also known as a "reverse air conditioner," is the way to go. It is also more energy-efficient, less costly, and more eco-friendly. Recent technological advancements have even enabled heat pumps to keep water cool when needed. However, the downside of heat pumps is that their efficiency drops once the outdoor temperature falls below 10 C (50 F).

The energy efficiency of heat pump pool heaters is evaluated by the coefficient of performance (COP). A higher COP value indicates greater efficiency.

Solar pool heating

Roof-mounted solar panels are also an alternative solution to pool heating. They are eco-friendly and long-lasting (generally 15 to 20 years).[2] However, they can be troublesome when it comes to efficiency, as it heavily depends on the amount of sunlight available.

The solar panels generally need to cover 50 to 100 per cent of the pool's surface for maximum results, which means there needs to be ample space on either the roof or the ground for installation.

Hybrid pool heater

A hybrid pool heater combines the best qualities of a pool heater and a heater pump. A thermal efficiency gas engine allows the pool to heat up swiftly and stay warm for longer, and its high-performance heat pump aspect contributes to its lower cost. Due to these dual qualities, it is on the higher end of the cost spectrum, but it delivers on performance.

Hybrid pool heaters can also combine solar pool heating with heat pumps. The integration of solar maximizes efficiency in the summer, and the heat

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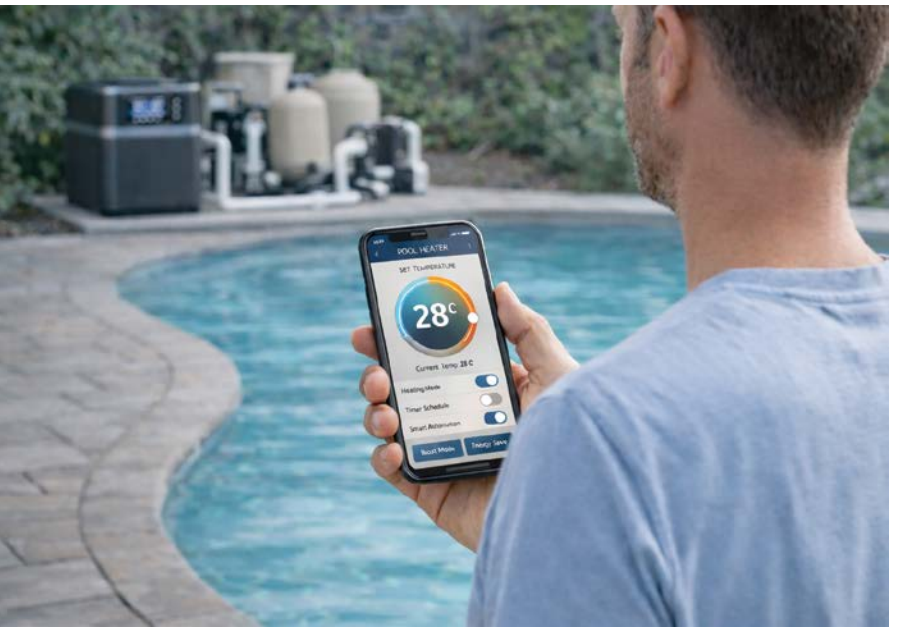

Artificial intelligence (AI) powered controls transform pool heaters into smart systems that optimize energy use, predict maintenance, and personalize heating based on user habits and real-time conditions.

pump comes into play in the winter months—making this combination a year-round solution.

Controls and features

The integration of up-to-date technology and the latest advancements, such as artificial intelligence (AI), into any pool product can significantly enhance its appeal. Customers want something that is efficient, easy to use, and easily accessible, especially with digital controls.

The following outlines several ways AI can enhance pool heater operation and control:

- Predictable trends—Alerting when and how much heating is needed, as well as predicting maintenance needs before failure occurs, further reducing downtime and service costs.
- Learning patterns—Analyzing past and real-time data such as usage patterns, environmental conditions, weather, filtration, etc.
- Efficiency—Controls to preheat the pool in time for peak usage, saving energy.
- Personalization—AI can allow the option of remembering user preferences (such as desired temperatures), as well as multiple profiles.
- IoT integration—With IoT-connected devices, AI can allow remote monitoring and control via apps, automate schedules based on user behaviour, and provide data-driven adjustments for energy and comfort.

AI in pool heating does not replace the heater; instead, it enhances its operation. The heaters become "smart" through AI, which manages when to run them, how much energy to use, and even predicts maintenance needs. This system works in conjunction with other smart technologies.[3]

Regulation and safety standards

In 2024, pool heaters were classified as energy-using products under the Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) Energy Efficiency Regulations, following the DOE's introduction of energy efficiency standards for electric pool heaters (it previously had standards for gas-fired pool heaters).[4]

Additionally, the CSA Group has a standard for gas-fired pool heaters (CSA/ANSI Z21.56:19/CSA 4.7:19) that covers construction, installation, and operation.[6]

The Ontario Energy & Water Efficiency Regulation (O. Reg. 509/18) is also a provincial standard that may affect broader appliance efficiency frameworks.[7]

Conclusion

There are various types of pool heaters available for sale, and understanding the customer's needs, location, and the space around the pool is essential for determining the best option. It is also important to know budget-friendly options such as pool blankets, wind protection for pools, solar covers (or windproof pool covers in general), solar rings, etc. There are evidently many options in the solar realm to explore when it comes to pool heating, but they depend heavily on one key factor: sun exposure.

Integrating AI functionality into pool heaters can further enhance their appeal, making pool maintenance easier year-round. Overall, pool heaters and heat pumps are valuable assets for extending the swimming season, which is their strongest selling point.

Notes

[1] Refer to energy.gov/energysaver/gas-pool-heaters

[2] See riverpoolsandspas.com/blog/swimming-pool-heater-cost-types

[3] Read linkedin.com/pulse/swimming-pool-heating-devices-market-from-ai-integration-ddepf/

[4] Learn more at natural-resources.canada.ca/energy-efficiency/energy-efficiency-regulations/pool-heaters

[5] Refer to poolproswi.com/post/everything-you-need-to-know-about-pool-heaters

[6] Visit scc-ccn.ca/standards/notices-of-intent/csa-group/gas-fired-pool-heaters-1

[7] Read more at ontario.ca/laws/regulation/180509/v13

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Scaling Without Compromise

The Case for Centralized Pool Operations in Multifacility Aquatic Programs

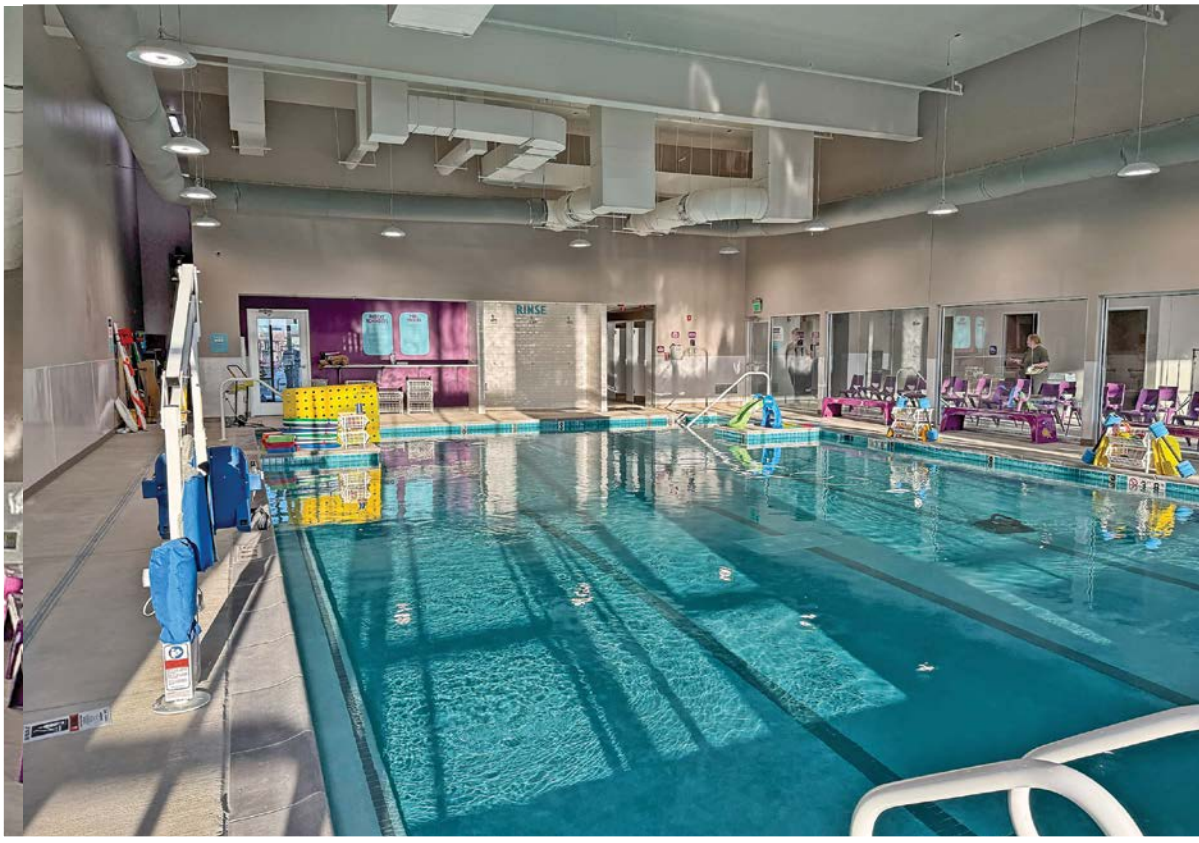
By Myles Phelps

PHOTOS COURTESY EMLER SWIM SCHOOLS

When Emler Swim School, a multilocation swim instruction program operating indoor pools, began experiencing inconsistent water chemistry, unreliable air quality, and unpredictable service response times, leadership determined the issue was structural, not operational. Centralizing aquatic maintenance reshaped the organization's performance, cost controls, and long-term scalability.

Background: A growing program facing growing pains

One of North America's largest privately operated swim instruction programs has been teaching children and adults to swim since 1975. Today, the organization serves tens of thousands of students per week. Each facility operates a heated indoor pool, maintained year-round at approximately



Maintaining consistent temperature, water chemistry, and air quality across dozens of facilities placed increasing demands on mechanical and water-treatment systems.

32 C (90 F), providing a consistent, comfortable environment central to its instructional model.

Sustaining that promise across all their facilities is no small feat. Indoor pools at that temperature place relentless demands on water chemistry management, indoor air quality (IAQ) systems, and mechanical equipment. For years, Emler relied on a combination of in-house staff and independent local contractors to meet these demands. That approach, while manageable at a smaller scale, began showing cracks as the organization expanded.

"When selecting a provider, it was important to us that they deliver the same level of customer service to us that we provide to our customers. Our pools and the environments they operate in are critical to our business, so we needed a partner who takes that responsibility seriously from a preventative maintenance standpoint and when equipment issues arise," says Craig Kinney, senior vice-president and strategic planning of Emler Swim Schools.

The challenge: Inconsistency at scale

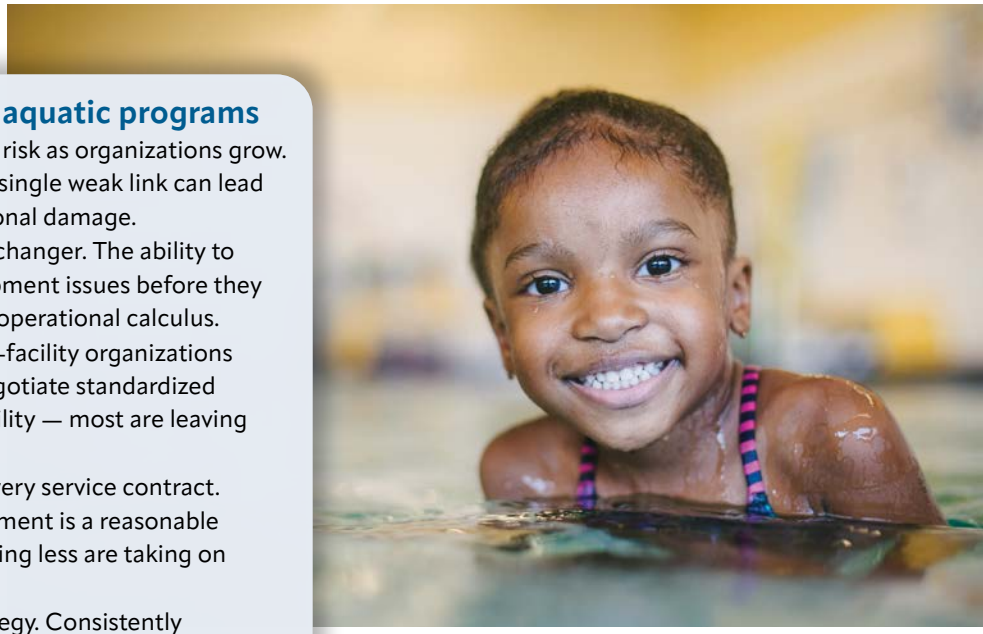
The core operational risk for a swim school is pool closure. A shut-down pool means cancelled lessons, disappointed families, and direct revenue loss.

While some locations ran smoothly, others experienced recurring problems with water chemistry imbalances, malfunctioning UV equipment, and heaters that failed to maintain the school's required 90-degree water temperature.

The root cause was inconsistent service quality. The calibre of local aquatic maintenance providers varied dramatically from market to market.

Key takeaways for multifacility aquatic programs

- Decentralized maintenance compounds risk as organizations grow. Local vendor quality varies widely, and a single weak link can lead to closures, safety incidents, or reputational damage.
- Proactive remote monitoring is a game-changer. The ability to detect and respond to chemical or equipment issues before they cause closures fundamentally shifts the operational calculus.
- Scale creates purchasing leverage. Multi-facility organizations should use their collective volume to negotiate standardized chemical pricing and supply chain reliability — most are leaving money on the table.
- Guaranteed response times belong in every service contract. A six-hour emergency response commitment is a reasonable standard; organizations accepting anything less are taking on unnecessary risk.
- Preventive maintenance is a capital strategy. Consistently maintained equipment lasts longer. The cost of a structured maintenance program is almost always lower than the cost of accelerated equipment replacement.



With tens of thousands of students per week relying on uninterrupted lessons, avoiding unplanned pool closures became a critical operational priority.

Some locations were well-served; others relied on solo operators, however competent, who lacked the capacity to respond to emergencies. Single service providers can rarely guarantee a same-day response, let alone a same-week response. For a program built on the promise of uninterrupted daily swim instruction, waiting up to a week for a service call was simply not tenable.

The catalyst: Water treatment and chemical cost visibility

The organizational trigger for change was the inconsistency in water treatment and the variability in chemical costs and availability. Following an ownership transition, a review of operating costs quickly identified significant variability in pool chemical pricing and maintenance expenditures across locations. In some markets, the school was paying nearly twice as much for the same water-treatment chemicals.

The analysis made the case clear: the swim school had scaled its footprint without scaling its operational infrastructure.

Standardizing systems, protocols, and vendor relationships was not merely a best practice; it was a financial imperative. The organization began evaluating centralized aquatic service models and, in October 2025, formalized a partnership with a single national provider.

The solution: Centralized service, standardized protocols

Partnering with a national aquatic service provider allowed the organization to standardize protocols across most of its facilities, improve response time commitments, and consolidate its purchasing power.

Emler Swim School selected a centralized aquatic maintenance program, AquatiCare, from a national commercial pool service provider with more than 60 years of experience serving aquatic facilities across multiple markets, helping them shift from reactive to preventive maintenance. The centralized service model has helped hundreds of aquatic facilities take a proactive approach to pool management, allowing individual facilities such as Emler Swim School to customize their specific facility needs.

The service provider's technicians are all certified pool operators (CPOs) who are current on all industry, safety, and technology standards. Additionally, the team is trained in major pump rooms and mechanical systems, enabling the technicians to perform comprehensive maintenance on chemical, deck, and mechanical items, supporting equipment longevity and efficient water management. The goal is to ensure the swim school's pools are safe and properly maintained, allowing staff to concentrate on programming and teaching students.

Operational impact: From reactive closures to consistent uptime

The shift to a centralized model has produced measurable results. For example, Emler's centralized service agreement guarantees a six-hour response

time for emergency calls, an improvement over the days or weeks that on-call local contractors sometimes required. Chemical deliveries are guaranteed within 24 to 48 hours across all service regions, eliminating distribution bottlenecks that previously caused shortages at some facilities.

Perhaps most significantly, the centralized service model has helped reduce disruptions to swim lessons. In the past, occasional pool closures, sometimes related to equipment or other operational factors, could interrupt programming.

Cost standardization and supply chain control

Beyond service reliability, the partnership with the centralized service provider has reshaped how Emler manages procurement. By consolidating chemical purchases through a single provider, the organization now benefits from volume pricing previously unavailable at the individual location level.

Chemical costs have been standardized across all markets, narrowing the price gaps that existed under the decentralized model. The service provider's supply chain infrastructure also mitigates a less visible but significant operational risk: product availability. Under the previous model, some locations struggled to access certain chemical

Reliable water balance and equipment performance are essential to maintaining daily programming without cancellations or service-related disruptions.

Inconsistent chemistry management and delayed service response times previously created operational risk across some locations.

Centralizing aquatic maintenance enabled on-site teams to focus on instruction while water quality and equipment readiness were managed through standardized service protocols.

products or brands due to regional distribution constraints. The service provider's national supply network removes that constraint, ensuring consistent product delivery across service regions.

Equipment reliability and preventive maintenance

Water chemistry is only one aspect of aquatic facility performance. The mechanical systems that keep pools operational—pumps, filters, heaters, UV systems, and chemical controllers—require consistent, professional attention to operate reliably and cost-effectively throughout their expected service lives.

Under the previous decentralized model, deferred maintenance was common. UV bulbs burned out and went unreplaced. Heaters corroded prematurely. Sand filters were inconsistently cleaned. Pump rooms developed leaks that went unaddressed. These failures did not just cause operational disruptions; they shortened equipment life-cycles and increased replacement costs.

The centralized model addresses this through standardized maintenance schedules. Access to recognized CPO technicians and engineering expertise through the service provider's engineering division enables Emler's facilities to anticipate equipment issues before they become failures. When renovation is required, the service provider's integrated design and construction capability makes planning and execution more coordinated—an operational advantage for an organization managing facilities across multiple regions.

Broader lessons: Beyond swim schools

The operational dynamics described here are not unique to swim instruction programs. Any multi-

location organization operating aquatic facilities—fitness clubs, hotel chains, university recreation centres, or community recreation programs—faces the same underlying tension: the complexity of pool maintenance grows faster than headcount, and local vendors cannot always deliver the consistency that a regional or national brand requires.

The fitness club sector offers a particularly instructive parallel. National fitness clubs with pools and hot tubs across multiple markets have reported similar patterns: before centralizing maintenance, pools or spas were closed at any given time due to chemistry or equipment issues. After transitioning to a national service model, unplanned closures effectively ceased, and facility managers reported notable improvements in both water clarity and pump room reliability.

For organizations evaluating this transition, the business case typically rests on three pillars: service reliability (guaranteed response times and remote monitoring), cost standardization (volume-based pricing for chemicals and parts), and operational accountability (a single-vendor relationship with defined performance standards). For the swim school organization, the partnership with the centralized service provider has demonstrated measurable progress across all three areas. On-site staff can remain focused on programming and instruction while the centralized service provider manages water quality and equipment readiness.

Myles Phelps is the vice-president of strategic partnerships for Landmark Aquatic, a nationwide provider of commercial aquatic facility design, construction, and maintenance services. An aquatics industry veteran, Phelps has over 14 years of experience, beginning behind the wheel of a chemical truck, which has given him a deep understanding of what it takes to keep aquatic facilities thriving. He can be reached via email at mphelps@landmarkaquatic.com.

Holding the Line

Stable Earnings, Limited Raises, and Evolving Roles Reshape the Workforce Outlook

By Jason Cramp

For more than 19 years, *Pool & Spa Marketing* has conducted its annual salary survey to offer a detailed view of the people and businesses shaping Canada's pool, spa, and hot tub sector. Alongside the publication's annual state-of-the-industry report, which tracks residential pool permits nationwide, the survey offers a broader perspective on market activity and the workforce behind it.

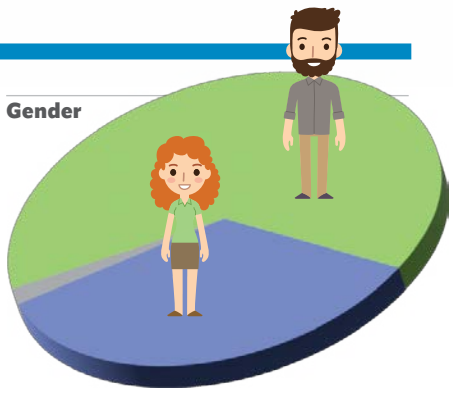
This year's findings examine experience, education, compensation, job satisfaction, business performance, and workplace trends across the pool, hot tub, landscape design/build, and retail segments. The results highlight a sector-balancing opportunity amid ongoing operational and economic pressures.

The findings point to an industry that remains engaged and adaptable, but not without challenges. Service and renovation work continue to support many businesses, while labour availability, rising costs, and broader market uncertainty remain key influences on sentiment.

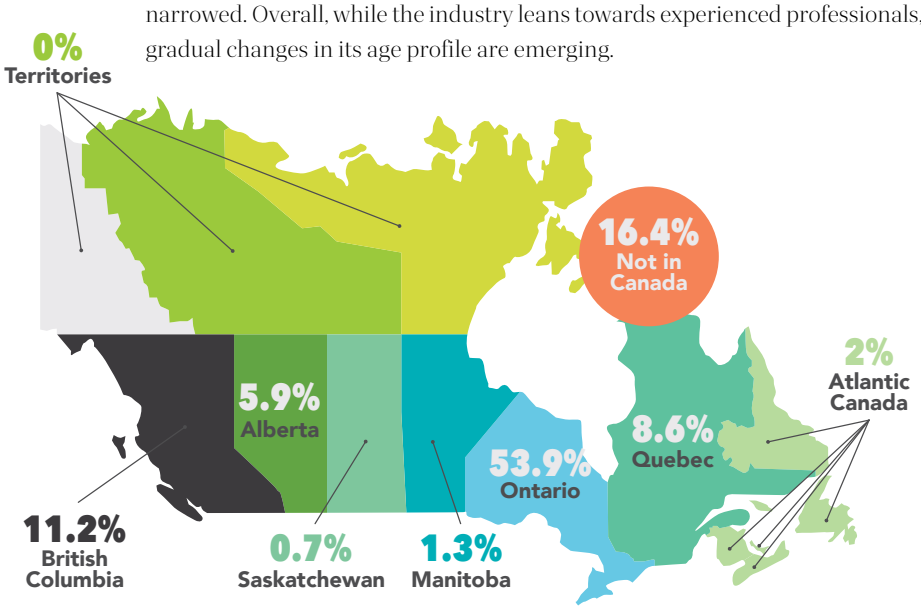
General representation of the workforce

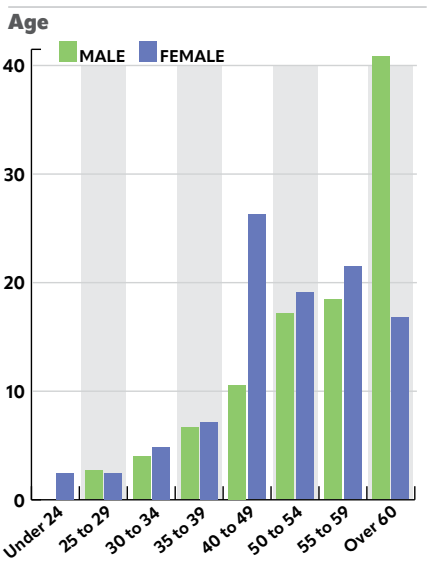
This year's survey saw contributions from industry professionals across Canada, with Ontario providing the largest share of responses, followed by British Columbia and Quebec. While participation remained steady overall, Atlantic Canada experienced a notable decline.

Gender representation shifted this year, with a decrease in male respondents and a corresponding increase in female participation, resulting in a more balanced respondent pool. The workforce remains seasoned, with over two-thirds of participants aged 50 and older, though there was a modest rise in younger respondents, particularly in the 35-39 age group. Female representation in younger age groups remains higher than that of males, though the gap has narrowed. Overall, while the industry leans towards experienced professionals, gradual changes in its age profile are emerging.



63.6% Male **34.7%** Female
1.7% Prefer not to disclose



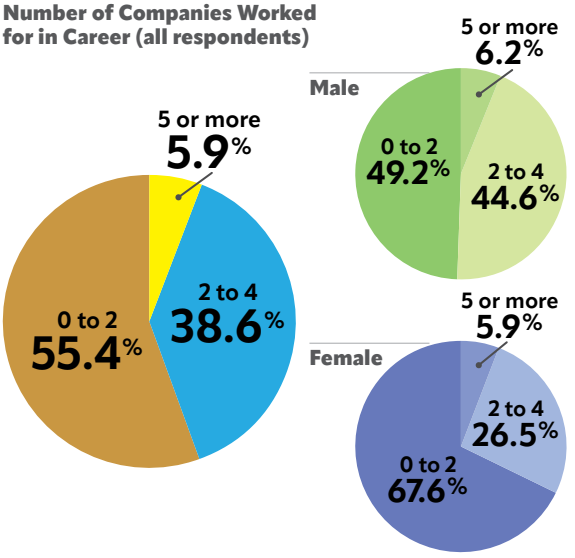


Career paths and retaining top talent

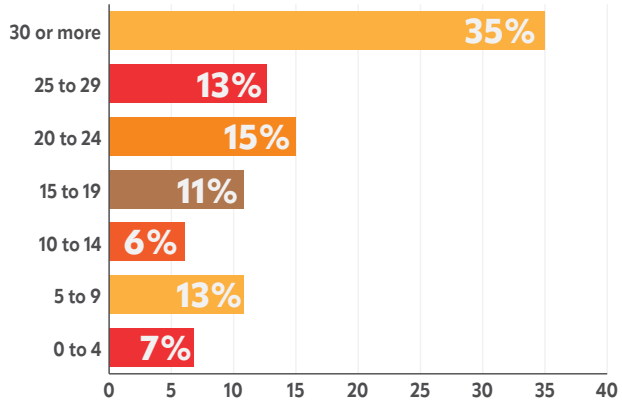
After years of growth, the percentage of respondents planning to leave the pool and spa industry in the next five years slightly declined from 19 to 17 per cent. This trend is more notable among male respondents. Meanwhile, the proportion of those expecting to stay in their current roles fell to 39 per cent, continuing a downward trend. However, the number intending to transition into sales, marketing, management, or consulting roles increased to 24 per cent, indicating greater career mobility within the industry.

Despite these changes, most respondents still intend to remain in the sector. This ongoing commitment is encouraging for an industry that has often struggled with recruitment and retention, especially in peak seasons. Additionally, 10 per cent of respondents reported working for five or more companies, reversing a previous decline. In comparison, 60 per cent have worked for just one or two, showing some workforce movement, but a stable core remains.

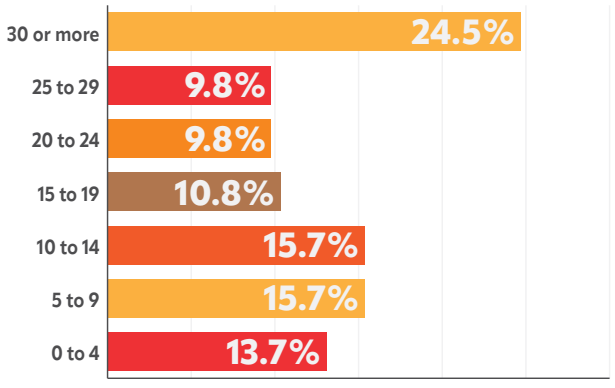
Number of Companies Worked for in Career (all respondents)



Years in the industry (all respondents)



Years with current company (all respondents)



Who is shaping the industry today?

Pool & Spa Marketing connects professionals in the pool, spa/hot tub, and landscape sectors with timely news, product updates, and best practices through its print publication and Waterlines e-newsletter. It reaches builders, contractors, service technicians, landscape architects, retail managers, manufacturers, and suppliers.

For the 10th consecutive year, business owners represent the largest respondent group. While this segment remains dominant, there are modest shifts: participation from service technicians and retail sales managers has increased. At the same time, representation among residential and commercial builders/contractors has slightly declined, as has that of landscape architects and designers. This trend indicates a growing focus on service, retail, and operations roles within the industry.

5.9%	2.9%	36.3%	5.9%	5.9%	2.9%	10.8%	2.9%	26.5%
Builder/ contractor (residential)	Builder/ contractor (commercial)	Business owner	Landscape architect/ designer	Retail sales manager	Retail sales associate	Service manager	Service technician	Other

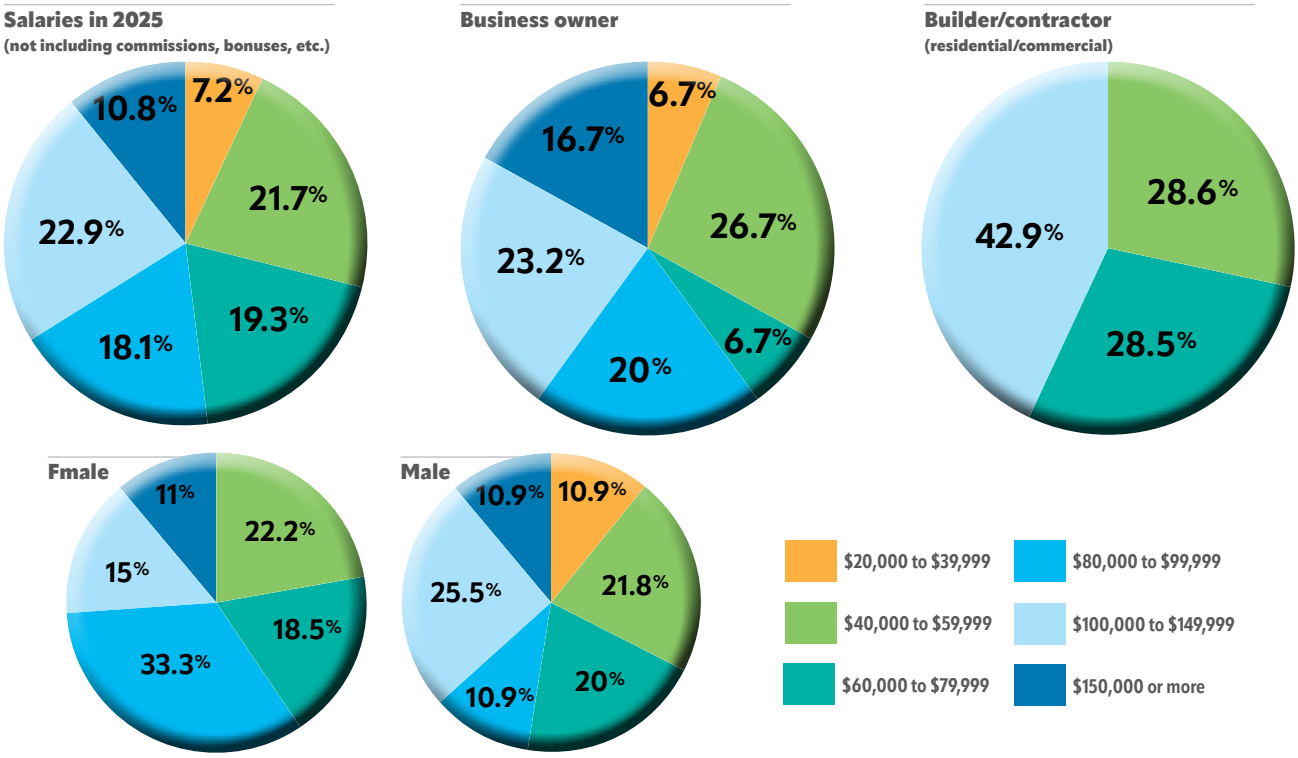
Salary growth trends

Compensation in the pool and spa industry shows a diverse range of roles and responsibilities, with a notable concentration in mid-range salaries. This year, 60 per cent of respondents reported earning between $60,000 and $149,000, and 34 per cent earned more than $100,000, although these figures indicate less robust upper-end representation compared to previous years.

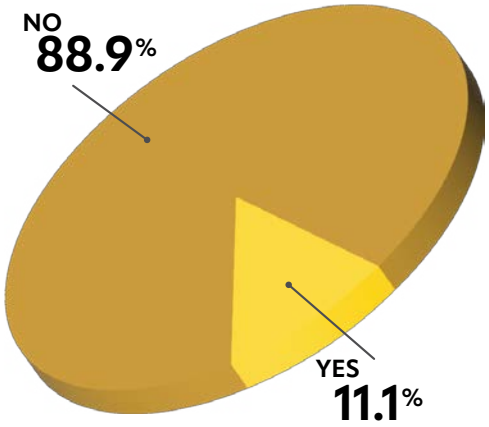
Overall salary growth has slowed, with 43 per cent of respondents receiving no raise and 41 per cent reporting modest increases of one to five per cent. Only a small percentage saw raises exceeding 10 per cent, highlighting a trend of limited wage growth.

Demographically, males were more likely to report no salary increase, while females experienced smaller raises. Business owners often reported stagnant compensation due to cost management pressures. Interestingly, those with industry training enjoyed slightly better wage growth.

In summary, while compensation remains steady, upward movement is constrained, reflecting broader economic pressures affecting salary adjustments across the industry.



Percentage of all respondents who hold a professional designation from an industry association



Hands-on learning remains essential

This year's survey shows a continued rise in formal education among respondents, with 94.7 per cent holding a degree. However, only 5.3 per cent reported their education is directly related to the pool and spa industry, revealing a gap between academic qualifications and industry-specific training.

The distribution of education levels shifted, with fewer respondents having some college education without a degree, while those with a high school diploma or equivalent increased, resulting in a more even split between the groups.

Industry training participation presents a mixed picture. Manufacturer and dealer training rose to 58 per cent, and Certified Pool/Spa Operator (CPO) certification reached 39 per cent, indicating a gradual recovery. Conversely, participation in association-led education declined, with those taking PHTCC training dropping to 28 per cent and PHTA education falling to 18 per cent.

Training trends varied by role: business owners and builders/contractors showed higher participation in CPO certification, while manufacturers adopted training universally. Overall, the findings emphasize that despite a highly educated workforce, there is a lack of formal training aligned with the pool and spa industry, necessitating a continued reliance on hands-on learning and manufacturer-led training.

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Key shifts in work dynamics

Employment patterns in the pool and spa industry remain largely stable, with full-time, year-round work continuing to define the workforce.

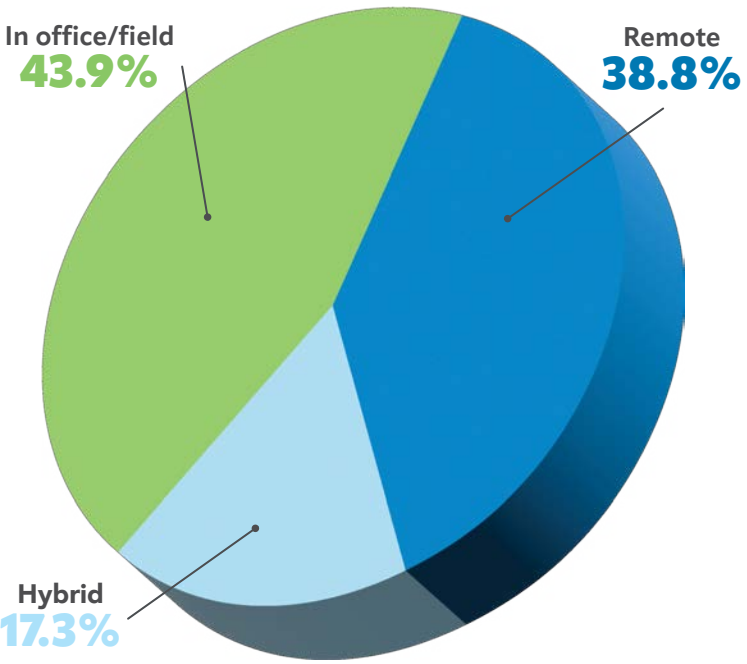
In 2026, 86 per cent of respondents reported working full-time, a slight decrease from 88 per cent the previous year. Similarly, 91 per cent indicated they are employed year-round, reinforcing the industry's reliance on consistent, ongoing work despite its seasonal nature.

Compensation structure also remains largely unchanged. The majority of respondents (83 per cent) reported not being paid an hourly wage—indicating they earn an annual salary—representing a slight decline from 86 per cent in 2025.

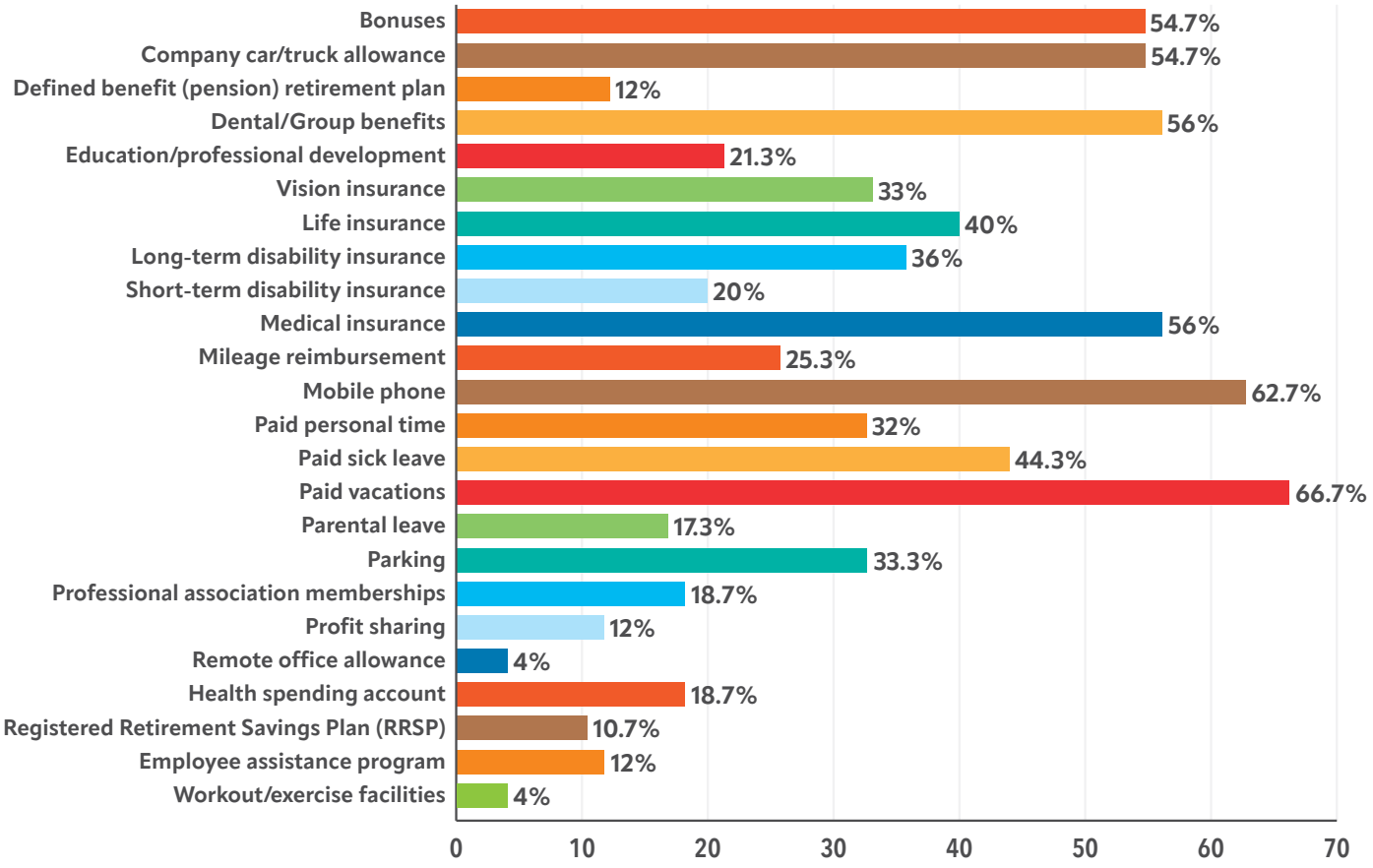
Work arrangements, however, showed a more notable shift. The proportion of respondents working fully remotely declined to 39 per cent, down from 56 per cent the previous year. At the same time, those reporting no remote work increased to 44 per cent, while hybrid arrangements rose to 17 per cent, up from 11 per cent in 2025.

These changes suggest a continued shift toward on-site work environments, particularly in operational and field-based roles where remote work is less practical. While flexibility remains part of the employment landscape, the industry appears to be settling into a more balanced mix of remote, hybrid, and in-person work.

Work model



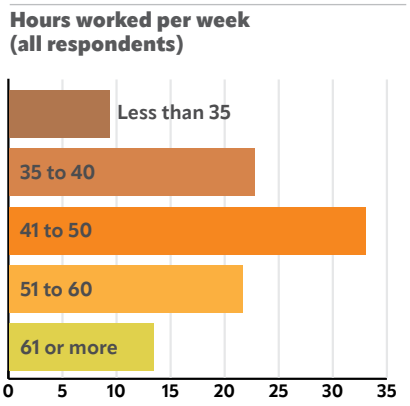
Company provided benefits

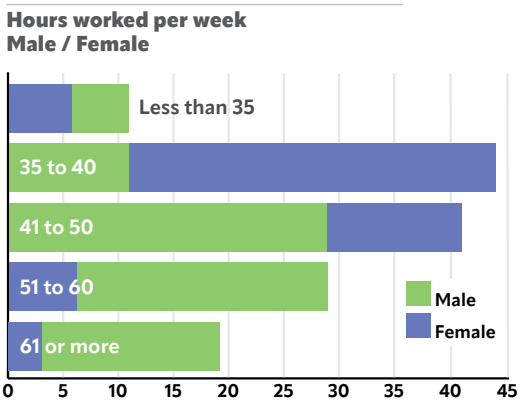


Working hours and benefits

The pool and spa industry continues to be influenced by cyclical factors in working hours, driven by seasonal demand and project timelines. This year indicates a normalization after the heightened activity of recent years.

The largest group of respondents (42 per cent) reported working 41-50 hours per week, the most common workload. Notably, those working 35-40 hours increased to 19 per cent, and those working fewer than 35 hours rose to 13 per cent. In contrast, longer workweeks are declining, with only 19 per cent working 51-60 hours and just seven per cent exceeding 61 hours, suggesting a shift away from extended hours. Work patterns vary by role: business owners tend to work longer hours due to management demands, while builders and contractors show a more balanced distribution of hours. Overall, the data indicate that while the industry remains busy, workloads are becoming more balanced and manageable, reflecting a transition toward a sustainable pace as workforce pressures ease.





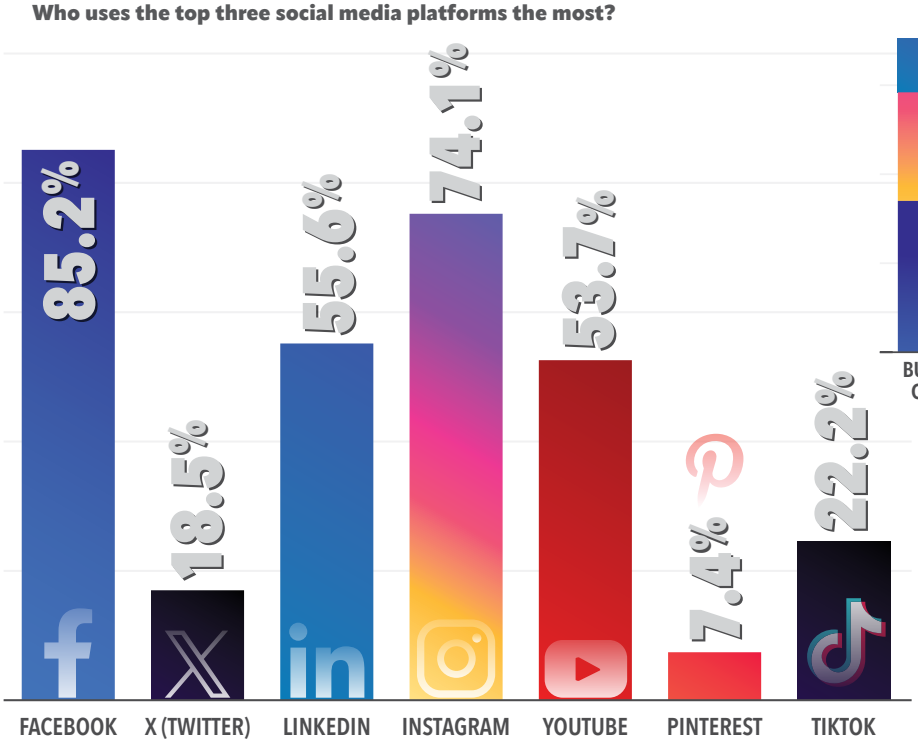
Engaging across multiple social media channels

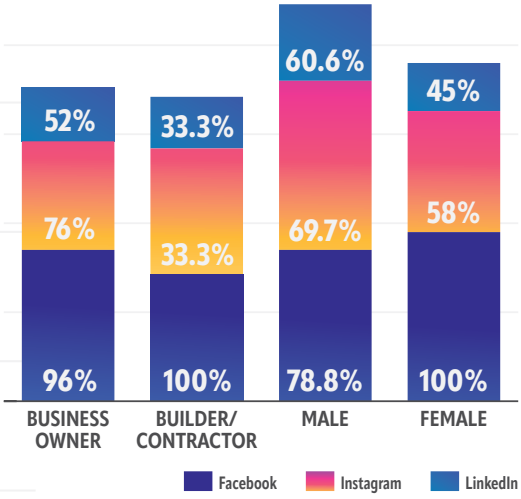
Social media continues to play a central role in how pool and spa businesses connect with customers and promote their services, with adoption remaining high across several key platforms.

Facebook remains the most widely used platform, with 85 per cent of respondents reporting use. Instagram follows closely at 74 per cent, reinforcing its importance for visual content and project showcasing. LinkedIn (56 per cent) and YouTube (54 per cent) also demonstrate strong engagement, reflecting a growing emphasis on professional networking and video-based content.

Emerging and secondary platforms show more varied adoption. TikTok usage reached 22 per cent, indicating continued experimentation with short-form content, while X (18 per cent), Reddit (15 per cent), and Pinterest (seven per cent) remain more niche channels.

Overall, the data suggests that while core platforms remain dominant, businesses are increasingly diversifying their social media strategies to reach different audiences and support marketing efforts across multiple channels.





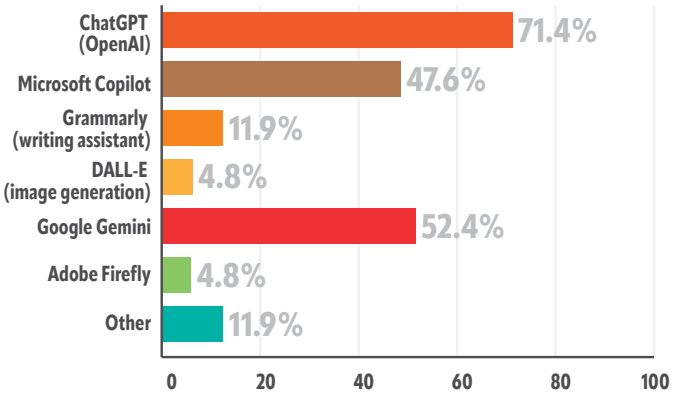
Artificial intelligence enters the conversation

In its second year of tracking, artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to establish a foothold within the pool and spa industry, with adoption slowly increasing as more businesses explore its potential.

This year, 33 per cent of respondents reported using AI, up from approximately 28 per cent in the previous survey. While this shows a notable increase, the majority of respondents—67 per cent—still have not integrated AI into their workflows, suggesting that adoption remains in the early stages.

Among AI users, ChatGPT continues to lead, with the majority of respondents citing it as their primary tool. Other platforms, including Microsoft Copilot, MidJourney, and DALL·E, see more limited use, indicating a landscape still centred around a single, widely adopted solution.

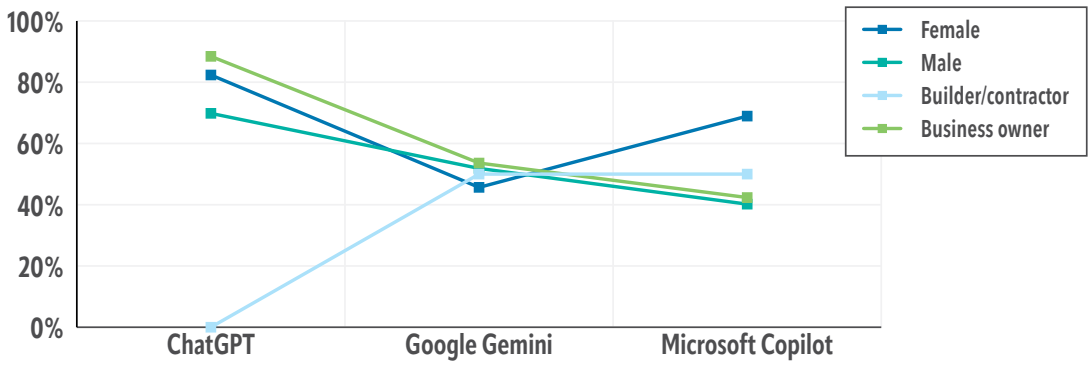
The way AI is used has stayed mostly the same. Writing and content creation still dominate, followed by applications such as research, marketing support, customer service, and image or video creation. More technical uses, such as data analysis and coding, remain less common.



Adoption trends continue to vary by role, with business owners and builder/contractors among the most active users. Overall, the results indicate that while AI usage is expanding, its main focus remains on enhancing efficiency in daily tasks rather than fundamentally transforming operations.

As awareness and familiarity grow, AI is likely to become a more widespread tool across the industry, though its wider impact is still evolving.

Who uses the top three artificial intelligence (AI) platforms the most?



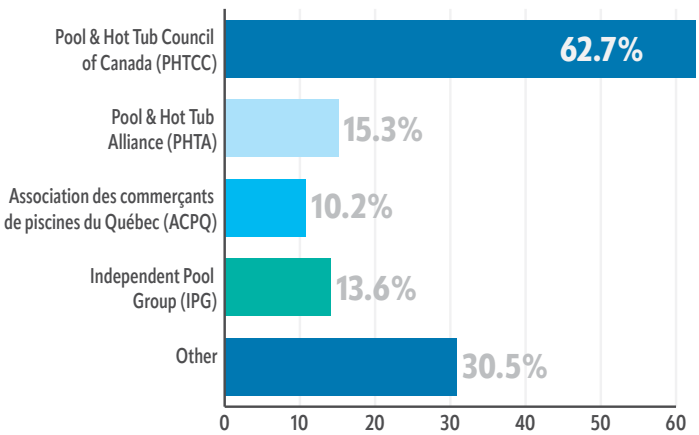
New trends in association engagement

This year's survey results reveal a varied but distinctly different picture of association participation compared to previous reports. Membership in the Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada (PHTCC) rose to 63 per cent, up from 58 per cent in the last survey, reinforcing its status as the most widely represented association among respondents. Participation remains notably strong among male respondents and business owners.

In contrast, membership in the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) decreased slightly to 15 per cent, down from 17 per cent last year, reflecting relatively stable yet modest participation overall.

Membership in the Association des commerçants de piscines du Québec (ACPQ) rose to 10 per cent, more than doubling from five per cent in the previous survey. This represents the strongest year-over-year increase among the tracked associations and indicates renewed engagement from Quebec-based respondents.

The Independent Pool Group (IPG) decreased to 14 per cent from 24 per cent last year. This marks the most significant decline



in the category and indicates weaker participation among respondents in 2026 compared to the previous survey.

Overall, the findings suggest a reshuffling in engagement levels rather than a consistent trend. PHTCC strengthened, ACPQ gained ground, PHTA remained relatively stable, and IPG declined, indicating that respondents are not moving uniformly across all organizations.

What is the biggest frustration with your job?

- Finding and retaining qualified staff
- Managing employees and performance issues
- Pay not matching responsibilities
- Dealing with difficult customers
- Increased competition (online and unqualified providers)
- Customer pushback on pricing and costs
- Unclear or shifting job roles
- Pressures of business ownership and leadership

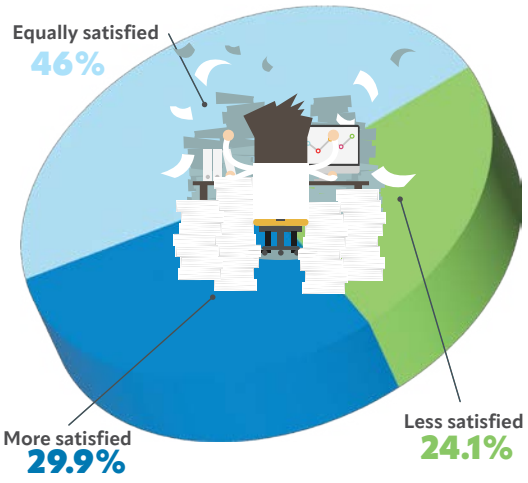
Trends in job satisfaction

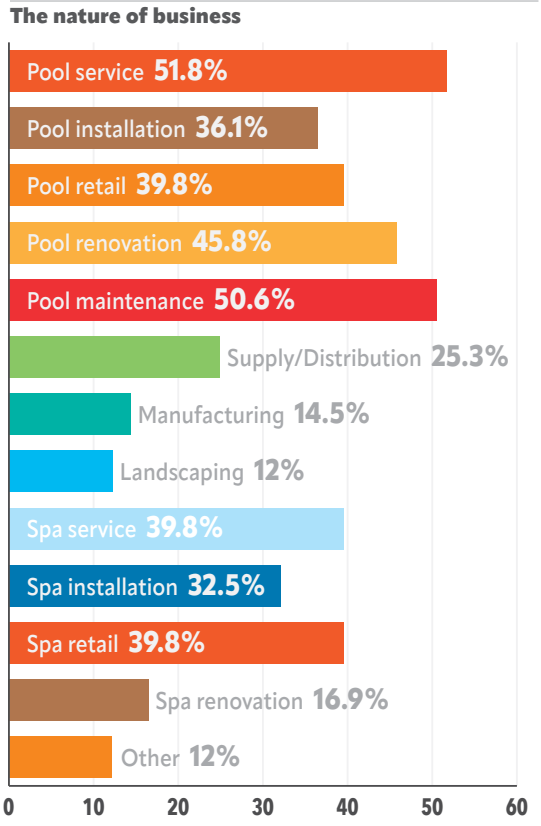
When asked to compare their current level of job satisfaction with five years ago, responses indicate a largely stable outlook across the industry.

Nearly half of respondents (46 per cent) reported feeling equally satisfied, while 30 per cent indicated they are more satisfied. At the same time, 24 per cent reported lower satisfaction levels.

These results suggest that, while overall sentiment remains steady, a meaningful portion of the workforce is still experiencing increased pressure or changing expectations in their roles. The balance between those reporting higher and lower satisfaction highlights an industry that is neither improving nor declining significantly in this area, but rather holding relatively consistent.

Overall, the findings indicate that job satisfaction remains stable, though not without underlying challenges, as professionals continue to navigate evolving market conditions and workplace demands.





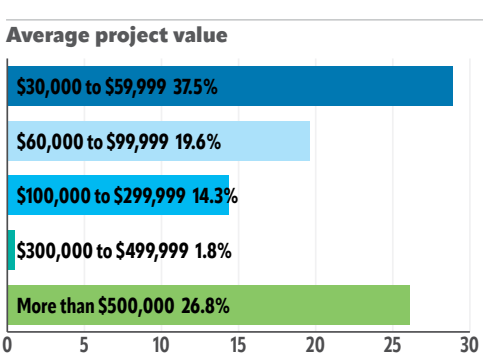
Key characteristics of industry employers

This year's survey highlights a shift in the pool and spa industry, with a decrease in the smallest businesses and modest growth among larger firms. Companies with one to five employees comprise 32 per cent of respondents, down from 41 per cent in 2025. Meanwhile, firms with six to 10 employees increased to 18 per cent (up from 13 per cent), while mid-sized companies (11 to 20 employees) remained stable at 12 per cent.

Larger firms also saw gains, with those employing 41 to 99 employees rising to 13 per cent and firms with 100 to 500 employees increasing to 10 per cent. This indicates a slight expansion in company sizes rather than the continued consolidation of smaller businesses.

Project values have shifted as well, with 38 per cent of respondents reporting average project values of $30,000 to $59,999, up from 30 per cent in 2025. Meanwhile, mid-range projects ($100,000 to $299,999) dropped to 14 per cent, down from 21 per cent. In contrast, projects exceeding $500,000 rose to 27 per cent, up from 20 per cent in 2025.

These trends suggest a market divided by economic pressures, with demand for smaller, cost-effective projects rising alongside continued investment from higher-end clients in premium builds.



Proactive Pools, Predictable Costs

Preventing risk before expenses escalate

By Brian Bergeski

PHOTOS COURTESY SWIM CLUB MANAGEMENT GROUP

Running large-scale aquatic operations means managing people, facilities, and risk in environments where safety expectations are high and resources are limited. For leaders responsible for municipal pools, homeowners' association (HOA) facilities, resorts, universities, and private clubs, that responsibility entails constant tension. On one side is the obligation to keep swimmers, staff, and facilities safe. On the other hand is the reality of fixed budgets, seasonal labour, aging pools, and increasing regulatory expectations.

Too often, safety and budget are framed as opposing forces. Safety is seen as costly, while budget discipline is viewed as restrictive. In practice, this framing pushes organizations toward reactive decision-making: money is spent only after incidents occur, inspections are sometimes rushed, training becomes inconsistent, and oversight is sporadic rather than steady.

The reality is more nuanced and encouraging. Many of the most effective safety practices in aquatic operations do not require major financial investment. They require time, focus, consistency, and leadership. When applied correctly, these practices reduce incidents, improve staff performance, stabilize operations, and lower long-term costs. Much of this comes down to controlling what can be controlled, something aquatic operations have more influence over than many realize.

This article examines how large-scale aquatic facilities can balance safety and budget through proactive planning, standardization, and operational

Managing multiple bodies of water within one property increases operational complexity and requires consistent, proactive oversight.

clarity, drawing on real-world operational principles. The concept, often referred to as "Project Zero" thinking, emphasizes achieving zero surprises, zero shortcuts, and zero tolerance for preventable risk.

The hidden cost of reactive safety

Most aquatic facilities do not intentionally deprioritize safety. Instead, they adopt reactive patterns driven by urgency, staffing pressures, and limited time:

- A serious incident triggers a policy update
- A failed inspection leads to last-minute repairs
- A staffing issue prompts rushed training
- A complaint often results in a temporary enforcement spike

These responses often feel necessary, but they come at a cost that is not always obvious. Reactive safety costs appear as emergency repairs rather than planned maintenance, increased insurance exposure, higher staff turnover due to stress or unclear expectations, and significant administrative time spent managing crises after an incident.

Ironically, reactive safety almost always costs more than proactive safety. The difference lies in perception. Reactive costs are easy to justify because they follow something visible. Proactive investments—time spent inspecting, coaching, training, and planning—are harder to value because their success is measured by what does not happen.

It is difficult to see the value in preventing incidents, injuries, and near-misses that never materialize. However, that is exactly where the return on proactive behaviour lies.

The challenge for facilities leaders is to shift from fixing problems after they occur to preventing predictable failures by controlling what can be controlled.

Safety is not a line item; it is an operating system

One of the most important mindset shifts in aquatic operations is recognizing that safety is not a standalone expense. It is an operating system that influences how people work, how facilities are managed, and how decisions are made every day. Simply put, do the staff care, and are they guarding from their hearts? Strong safety cultures are built on behaviours, not binders.

They rely on clear expectations, repetition and reinforcement, leadership visibility, and consistent follow-through. Many of these elements have little or no direct cost. What they require is discipline, structure, and alignment.

When safety is treated as a program, it shows up only during audits, inspections, or after incidents. When it is treated as an operating system, it becomes

Proactive safety begins on deck, where visible supervision, clear positioning, and engaged staff reduce preventable risk.

PHOTOS COURTESY AMERICAN POOL

Lifeguard vigilance and zone clarity are central to preventing incidents before they require emergency response.

Ongoing in-service conversations and real-time coaching reinforce scanning, emergency response, and consistent standards.

embedded in daily routines—how shifts start, how guards rotate, how leaders show up on deck, and how issues are addressed in real time.

Proactive inspections: 'Inspect what you expect'

Inspections are often misunderstood. In many facilities, they are treated as mere compliance exercises, done only for documentation.

In high-performing aquatic operations, inspections serve a different purpose: education and reinforcement.

Effective inspections confirm expectations, identify drift before it becomes dangerous, create coaching opportunities, and reinforce accountability through consistency. They are not "gotcha" moments. They should highlight what is going well while clearly addressing opportunities for improvement.

There is a saying in aquatics: a great lifeguard is the one who does not get wet. That mindset is rooted in proactive safety—positioning, scanning, zone clarity, and anticipation—not reaction.

Too often, the contributing factors to incidents are controllable: chair placement, poorly defined zones, under-maintained equipment, and unclear guard rotations, to name a few. None of these issues is expensive to fix, but all of them become costly when ignored.

Proactive inspections cost time, not money. That time investment pays off by reducing preventable failures, improving staff confidence, and making safety conversations normal rather than punitive.

Constant in-service: Training as a habit, not an event

One of the most common misconceptions in aquatic safety is that training is expensive. While certifications and formal courses have costs, most meaningful safety learning happens after verification on pool decks, in real conditions.

Ongoing in-service training and touchpoints with staff are among the most effective and least expensive safety tools available.

Short, consistent in-service sessions reinforce critical skills, address recent observations, adapt to real conditions, and keep safety top of mind. A few minutes at the start of each shift can prevent months of downstream issues. Review scanning techniques, emergency response steps, and recent near-misses. Most importantly, do not forget the good.

Constant in-service reframes training. Staff stop seeing it as punishment or remediation and begin seeing it as an investment in their performance and growth.

Facilities that struggle with safety train too infrequently. Facilities that excel train constantly, using a mix of micro-learning, hands-on drills, one-on-one coaching, and group discussions, enabling development from multiple angles at no cost but attention.

Leadership presence on deck strengthens accountability and ensures expectations are reinforced through engagement rather than documentation alone.

PHOTO COURTESY CONTINENTAL POOLS

Standardization reduces risk and cost

Large-scale aquatic operations often suffer from inconsistency. Different locations, supervisors, staff, or shifts develop their own interpretations of procedures. Over time, this variability becomes a risk.

Standardization does not mean rigidity. It means clear minimum expectations, a shared language, consistent responses to common situations, and predictable routines.

Standardized procedures for daily operations—from inspections to equipment placement—reduce variability and long-term operational risk.

PHOTO COURTESY SWIM CLUB MANAGEMENT GROUP

In aquatic operations, standardization applies across the board, from opening and closing procedures and chemical checks to lifeguard rotations, incident response, and equipment placement. The benefit is twofold. Safety improves because expectations are clear, and costs decrease because fewer errors occur.

When staff do not have to guess, improvise, or relearn expectations, performance stabilizes. Fewer mistakes mean fewer incidents, fewer repairs, and fewer escalations.

Leadership presence matters more than policies

Many facilities invest heavily in written policies but underinvest in leadership presence. A well-written manual cannot replace visible, engaged leadership.

Leadership presence in safety means being regularly seen on deck, asking questions rather than only giving directives, coaching in the moment, modelling calm, professional behaviour, and consistently reinforcing expectations.

This does not require additional staff or budget. It requires leaders to be intentional about how they spend their time.

Creating an environment where staff feel seen and supported matters, especially in aquatics, where a large percentage of lifeguards are minors, and many are in their first job. Ownership of safety should feel shared, not imposed.

Facilities with strong safety outcomes almost always have leaders who are visible, approachable, and consistent. Facilities that struggle often rely on documentation rather than engagement.

Eliminating surprise management

Surprise management, inconsistent enforcement of standards, or harsh reactions to issues create instability. These approaches may drive short-term compliance but lead to long-term resentment, hidden issues, and fear-based behaviour.

Fear is dangerous in aquatic management. Staff who are afraid to speak up may hide near-misses, avoid asking questions, or hesitate during emergencies.

A better model is predictable accountability. Expectations are clear. Oversight is consistent. Corrections are timely and respectful. Escalation follows a known path.

This approach builds psychological safety, which directly supports physical safety. Staff who feel safe speaking up help identify risks before they become incidents.

Time and energy: The real investment

Many of the most impactful safety improvements do not require money. They require time, attention, consistency, and discipline:

- Walk the pool deck
- Hold a five-minute in-service with one guard on break
- Coach instead of ignoring drift
- Hold weekly staff check-ins
- Call out wins and safe behaviour

As the saying goes: "your safety standard is not what you say it is—it is what you tolerate."

These choices compound over time. Small, consistent actions create cultures where safety is expected, reinforced, and shared—and where unsafe behaviour is neither normalized nor ignored.

Long-term thinking in seasonal environments

Aquatic operations are often seasonal, making long-term safety planning challenging. Short seasons, high turnover, and compressed timelines create pressure to simply get through the summer. This is exactly where proactive safety matters most.

Facilities that plan safety year-round, even when pools are closed, are better prepared when the season starts. Reviewing incidents, updating standards, training leaders, and preparing materials in the off-season reduces in-season stress and costs.

Preparation spreads effort over time rather than concentrating it during peak demand.

Aligning safety with budget reality

Balancing safety and budget is not about choosing one over the other. It is about aligning them.

That alignment occurs when safety is embedded in daily operations, leaders invest time before money, standards are clear and consistent, training is ongoing rather than episodic, and oversight is predictable rather than reactive.

Facilities that do this well often find that safety stabilizes costs rather than increases them. Incidents decline. Turnover slows. Insurance exposure improves. Leadership bandwidth increases.

Safety and budget are not opposites

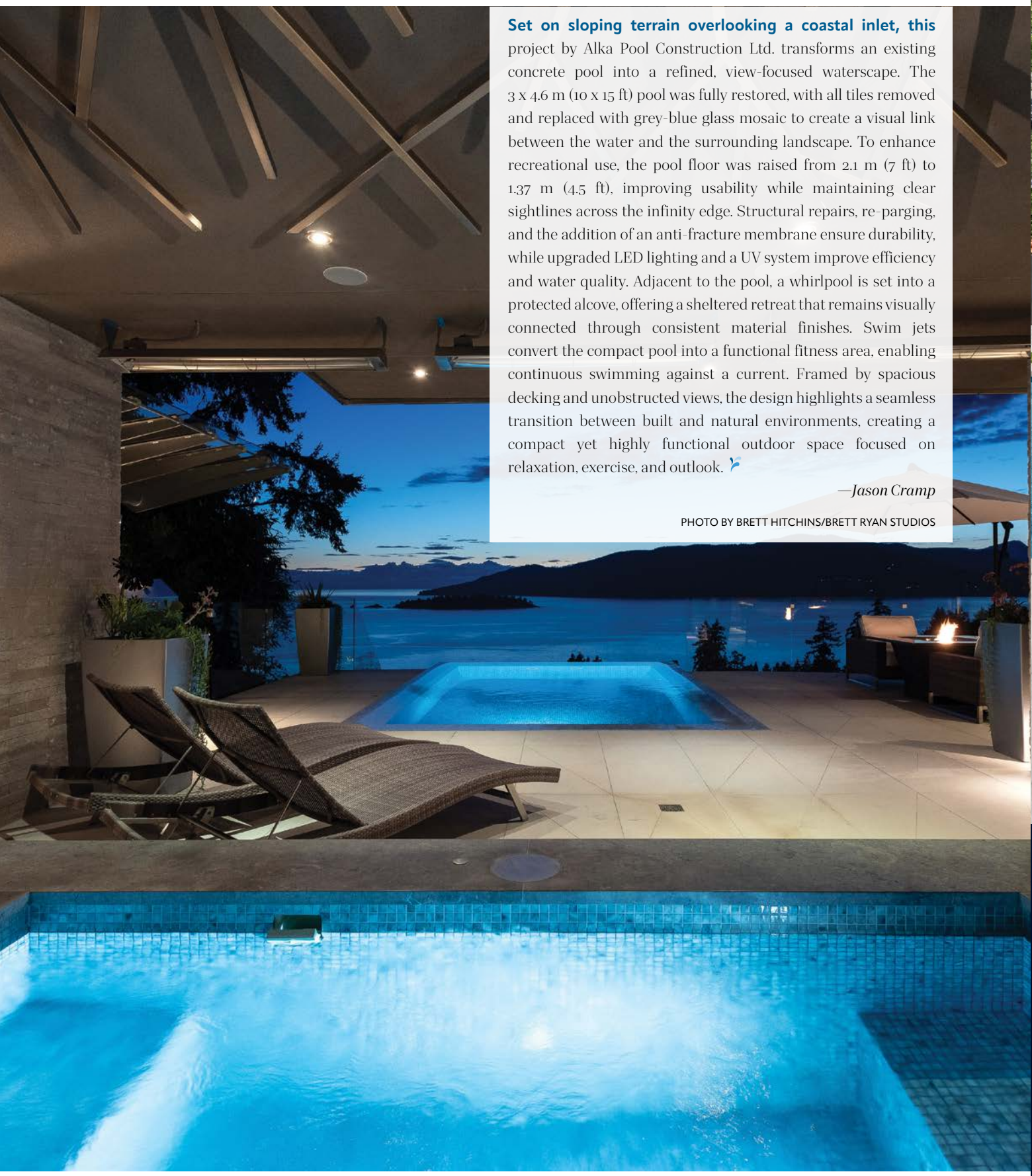
The idea that safety and budget discipline are at odds is one of the most persistent myths in large-scale aquatic operations.

In reality, the most effective safety practices often cost the least overall. They rely on time, attention, consistency, and strong leadership—not large capital investments.

By shifting from reactive responses to proactive systems through inspections, ongoing in-service, standardization, leadership presence, and predictable accountability, facilities can operate safely within real financial constraints.

When done right, safety is not an optional expense. It is a commitment to the people who work in and rely on aquatic facilities every day.

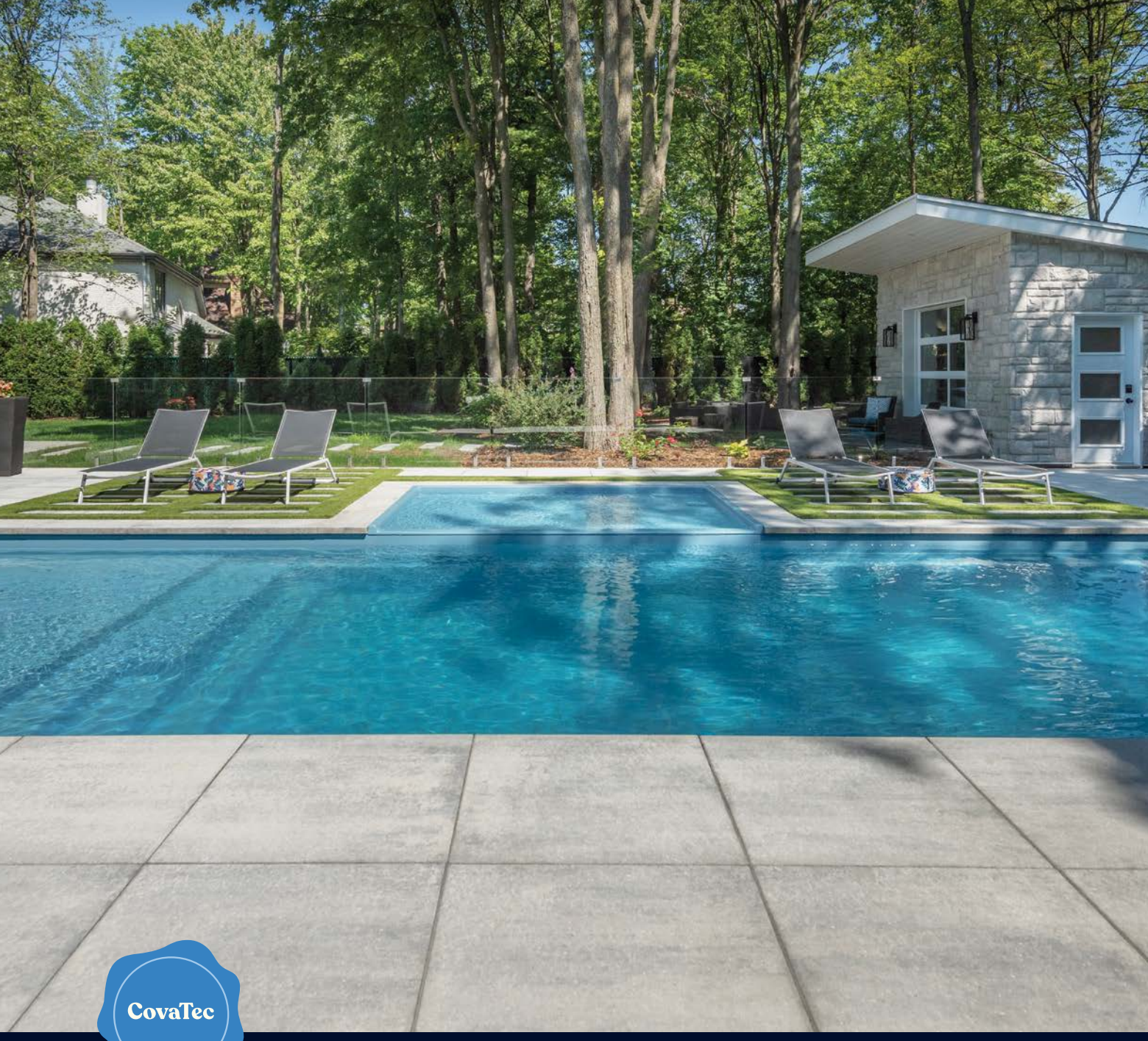
Brian Bergeski is the chief executive officer of commercial aquatics at The Amenity Collective, overseeing strategic growth, financial performance, and operational support across the platform. He works closely with brand leaders to ensure each organization has the structure, accountability, and resources needed to deliver consistent results for clients while empowering teams to lead with confidence. With 20 years of service in the aquatics industry, Bergeski began his career in construction services at American Pools and later advanced into broader leadership roles across aquatics operations within The Amenity Collective.



Set on sloping terrain overlooking a coastal inlet, this project by Alka Pool Construction Ltd. transforms an existing concrete pool into a refined, view-focused waterscape. The 3 x 4.6 m (10 x 15 ft) pool was fully restored, with all tiles removed and replaced with grey-blue glass mosaic to create a visual link between the water and the surrounding landscape. To enhance recreational use, the pool floor was raised from 2.1 m (7 ft) to 1.37 m (4.5 ft), improving usability while maintaining clear sightlines across the infinity edge. Structural repairs, re-parging, and the addition of an anti-fracture membrane ensure durability, while upgraded LED lighting and a UV system improve efficiency and water quality. Adjacent to the pool, a whirlpool is set into a protected alcove, offering a sheltered retreat that remains visually connected through consistent material finishes. Swim jets convert the compact pool into a functional fitness area, enabling continuous swimming against a current. Framed by spacious decking and unobstructed views, the design highlights a seamless transition between built and natural environments, creating a compact yet highly functional outdoor space focused on relaxation, exercise, and outlook.

—Jason Cramp

PHOTO BY BRETT HITCHINS/BRETT RYAN STUDIOS



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