

WOMAN CRUSADES AGAINST POOL FILTERS THAT KILLED HUSBAND

By Greg Webb

Sue Halverson has become an activist, warning the public about the dangers of a two-piece, kettle style pool filter that exploded and struck her husband in the head, killing him. With the help of an undisclosed settlement she won from the filter's manufacturer, Halverson created a website (www.poolsafetyadvocates.org) to inform the public of the potential danger this particular pool filter design causes. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) found 22 similar incidents since 1982, including four deaths. In the nonfatal incidents that were reported, the majority of victims suffered severe injuries, such as the loss of an eye or brain injuries.

According to the attorneys that filed damage claims, all of the injuries were results of a design flaw in the kettle-style or canister filters. The filters are held together by a fastener, in most cases a clamping system, that critics say can come loose after time and not hold the top and bottom pieces together properly; most of the filters also had air-relief valves that sometimes fail to release the built-up air pressure. In all of the cases, the victims were cleaning the cartridges inside the filter and had placed the top portion back on when compressed air gathered up in the filter, resulting in explosions that separated the top part of the two-piece filter away from the bottom. A member of the CPSC claimed the incidents involved maintenance issues where the covers were not installed properly after cleaning, were either not locked down sufficiently or correctly, or the system was not depressurized before the maintenance was attempted.

An attorney also pointed out that the reports of the filter explosions are scarce because of the way the CPSC tracks incidents; manufacturers only have to report incidents to the commission if they settle or lose lawsuits involving injury or death with the same model of a product during a 24 month period. Many different manufacturers, however, use the same filter design and the deaths would have to happen in clusters for anything to be reported to the CPSC. He says the better alternative is to have the top and bottom sections secured by bolts, like the type he has purchased for his own pool.

Three conditions must happen for the malfunction to occur and cause substantial harm. There has to be compressed air in the filter; the band has to malfunction; and either due to user error or the age of the filter, the victim must be leaning over the filter checking the gauges.

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