

Modern Construction and Safety

Should You Refinish Your Old Pool Furniture or Purchase New?

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As Published in *CondoManagement*

April 2004

Often, pool furniture that needs a new paint job is clearly in need of refinishing, because the old finish is chipped, peeling or flaking off. Sometimes, a finish is failing but it is not so obvious. When an association considers replacing the vinyl straps and the glides, they should also test the finish for good integrity. If the finish looks good, but is several years old, simply rub your hand briskly along the exposed metal in several places. If your hand comes back clean, the finish is probably okay for several more years. If a powdery material -- the color of the finish -- comes off on your hands, it is "chalking" and is a sure sign that the finish is failing. The finish may not last as long as new vinyl straps will last, thus re-strapping may not be a viable option.

Once an association determines that they need to refinish the furniture as opposed to simply re-strapping and re-gliding it, they should pay close attention to the following details. Are modern safety features present in the existing chaise lounges? If not, you should strongly consider replacing them to protect the community and visitors from injury, and to protect your association from liability concerns. If your furniture has good safety features, construction and quality, then it may be worthwhile to refinish it. The difference between stripping and repairing a frame versus the cost of a new one is not large. The finishing and strapping procedures and costs are generally the same.

Paper cutter pinch point

First, look at the frames for the following details: Is there a space of at least three-quarters of an inch between the headrest and the frame of the chaise? If not, it may have a pinch point that could cause serious injuries, including crushed and severed fingers. We call this a "paper cutter." The injury occurs when a person is attempting to adjust the position of the chaise while they are laying on it. They reach awkwardly behind themselves, trying to move the headrest into a different position. They can't see their hands, the ratchet teeth or the back rail. Sometimes they miss the back rail, lose their balance and fall back. One injury that can occur is a whiplash or back injury. They may grab the side of the chaise trying to stop their fall, and get their fingers caught between the headrest and the body. If the headrest is right next to the body and the fingers get caught there, it is very possible to crush or sever them. If a chaise has arms, the arms act as a safety feature, because they tend to keep the extremities out of that pinch point. Another injury may occur if the person gets his fingers caught between the ratchet teeth and the frame and falls back. If the ratchets are broken plastic or thin and sharp aluminum, nasty cuts, fractures or severed fingers may result.

Modern safety features

- A "safety space" of at least three-quarters inch between the headrest and the body.
- A "safety rail," where the side of the chaise does not run straight along the headrest, but is bent away, providing one to two inches extra clearance for the fingers.
- A "safety brace" in the headrest, which forces the headrest to default to the first position, and does not allow the headrest support to fall inside the frame
- All-aluminum ratchet teeth should be a minimum of three-sixteenths inch to one-quarter inch wide, so there is not a thin, sharp edge cushioning on the back rail of the chaise where the ratchet teeth connect to the frame,

so there is not metal-on-metal

- Sturdy hardware at the moving parts, preferably one-quarter inch stainless steel bolts and stainless steel lock nuts, that keeps the headrest in proper position and allow only up and down motion.
- A few manufacturers go a step further. They incorporate stainless steel "safety" washers on either side of the aluminum spacer in the headrest hardware that connects to the body. Stainless steel washers in the ratchet assembly are also a good safety feature.

The spacer is an aluminum bushing that separates the headrest from the body, and should be at least three-quarters inch wide. The stainless steel washers are put on both sides of the spacer; between it and the aluminum frame. These washers keep the spacer from boring a hole in the frame from repeated use. This may allow the headrest to wobble from side-to-side, with potential for frames breaking, causing injuries. Rivets that attach headrests to the frame may bend, causing damage to the frame and potential for injuries. One-quarter inch stainless steel bolts do not bend, and are stronger.

The stainless steel washers in the headrest and in the ratchet assembly also keep the lock nuts from working loose with repeated motion. This is a safety feature. If your lounges are missing these safety features, then it is worthy of serious consideration to replace them with new chaises that have them.

Damage from dragging

Look underneath the chaises for damage due to dragging. Those with sled-base construction and with commercial grade skids or wear plates are designed for dragging, and likely will show little or no damage. Chaises with legs or sled-base chaises that came with little nylon glides will likely have substantial damage if the glides were worn out long ago and never replaced. Refinishers can often weld aluminum skid plates to the bottoms of sled-base chaises after the fact and repair substantial dragging damage, but this increases the refinishing cost substantially.

Check all the welds

Examine all the welds, looking for cracks or breaks. On chaises, pay close attention to the side support braces and frames where people sit down. On chairs, check the braces and joints that connect the seat and back to the frame. Minor welding and repair is generally included in refinishing costs, but if there are a lot of repairs, extra charges may become substantial.

Keep in mind, not all broken welds are visible through the old finish of the furniture. There may be hairline cracks under the finish, which are not visible until the frame has been stripped.

Refinishers should strip the frames first, then look for all cracks and breaks, then re-weld them with full circumference welds. This may result in additional "concealed damage" charges for repairs that were not visible at the time the furniture was quoted for repair and refinishing.

Commercial grade bracing

On all pieces, check the cross braces. Commercial grade sled-base chaises generally have two braces under the body, and two side supports on each side. This design provides maximum support where people sit down, which is the greatest stress point.

Having two side supports on each side and two chaise body braces, keeps the frame from bending, distorting and breaking with heavy use.

The two side supports on each side should be at least one-half inch round minimum. Many factories today use three-quarter inch round side supports, which are much stronger. A lot of older chaises were sold with one-quarter inch round side supports, and these often crack and break in even moderate commercial use. Chaises with only one body brace or with only one side support on either side are generally considered to be of residential rather than commercial quality.

Dining chairs should have a brace at the bottom of the back legs, as well as the braces that hold the seat and back to the frame. Some factories also incorporate an extra brace under the seat, to keep the seat from bending in with hard use.

Powder coat finishes

In refinishing, if the existing finish is a powder coat finish, having very good integrity and if you are not doing a major color change, then it is sometimes appropriate to thoroughly sand down the existing finish and recoat a new finish over it. For best results, the sanded frame should be run through the powder coat oven and be "out-gassed" before the new finish is applied. Running the frame through the oven bakes out any residual moisture and gasses in the old finish. After out-gassing, the frame is powder coated and run through the oven again. This double baking process in a high quality oven system results in an excellent, durable and affordable new finish. The new finish may be as good as or better than the original, at significantly less cost than traditional stripping methods.

Sandblasting off the old finish

If the existing finish is liquid based, is peeling and flaking off or if there is substantial salt air corrosion under it, then the existing finish must be removed completely and the frame must be sandblasted prior to recoating.

Every time a piece of furniture is sandblasted, metal is removed from the frame. After being sandblasted three to five times, heavy gauge frames have likely been converted to light gauge tubing, and need to be replaced.

Shop around

The association should always shop around for new commercial grade furniture and refinishing options, because it often costs about as much to refinish furniture as it does to purchase new furniture, depending on the resources utilized. Generally, associations will have half of their furniture refinished at a time, so that they may keep half of it onsite to use. This doubles the shipping charges, and the amount of time it takes to complete the job.

Benefits of refinishing existing furniture

There may be a substantial saving of funds, which is worthwhile if the existing furniture is high quality, has good bracing and safety features, and is in good condition overall.

Benefits of purchasing new furniture

- The ability to upgrade to modern new Commercial grade furniture with better safety features
- Factory new furniture warranty and no worries for many years
- The association can use all their existing furniture until the new furniture arrives in one shipment, which is very convenient.
- They may be able to sell some of the old furniture and recoup some of the difference in costs, or donate it to a charitable organization for a tax deduction. For the best recycle money, the frames have to be stripped to aluminum only, with all straps, hardware -- unless aluminum rivets -- and glides removed. That process is labor intensive, but results in two to three times more recycle value than recycling it "as is."
- The new furniture job is done in half the time or less than the same job being refinished in two loads.

Look carefully at all the options for re-strapping and refinishing versus purchasing new furniture. Focusing on safety features will result in wise decisions as well as good looking and functional furniture, happy residents and fewer worries.