

Re-strapping, Repairing and Refinishing Your Old Pool Furniture

Factors to Consider

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As Published in *CondoManagement*
May 2004

Cleaning old straps

New vinyl straps have a finish on them, which is damaged by: commercial use, sun, chemicals, suntan oil, pool chlorine, harsh cleaning agents, unfiltered irrigation water and the pods and sap of several tropical plants and trees. When a mild soap--such as dish detergent--will no longer clean the straps, you should begin to add small amounts of household bleach. We recommend that you begin with about 20 percent bleach to 80 percent warm soapy water and rinse thoroughly when finished. Incrementally increase the amount of bleach as needed to clean the stains. When a solution of 50 percent household bleach and 50 percent soap and water will not clean the straps, it is probably time to begin thinking about replacing them.

Another sign that the straps need to be replaced is when they are no longer soft and pliable, but become stiff and inflexible. At this point, the straps have lost their memory. They will not bounce back from sagging when someone gets up off the furniture. Straps such as these should be watched closely. They will be prone to develop cracks, especially along the sides of the furniture where the straps wrap around the frame. They are at risk of breaking, which is a liability concern because injuries may result.

Re-strapping and re-gliding pool furniture

Typically, the first step in refurbishing pool furniture is to replace the straps. Usually the glides will need to be replaced as well. Better grades of commercial lounges have welded aluminum skid-plates or extra heavy-duty nylon skids that will last much longer than regular glides, but many chaises are sold with thin plastic glides that will wear down in a year or two of community use. Dining chair glides generally last a year or two. Damage to the frames and to painted or finished decks may result from dragging chaises or chairs with worn out glides.

Re-strapping is not something the average association should attempt to do themselves. Vinyl straps are attached to the furniture frames after they are softened with high heat, the equivalent of boiling water. This makes them pliable enough to be stretched onto the frame. The straps have to be pulled quickly and correctly before they cool, without disfiguring them. The frames are best held on jigs that are designed for the purpose. Burns, pulled muscles and hurt backs can result from improper technique, equipment and materials. It is generally best for experienced professionals to do this work in a factory setting, rather than attempting to do it yourself.

Plastic headrest ratchets

Many old-style chaises were sold with plastic headrest ratchets: the "teeth" that adjust the headrest in different positions. Some of these old-style plastic ratchets represent a significant liability concern, because they can break after repeated use, causing the headrest to forcefully collapse. Consumers can also be injured if their fingers get caught between broken ratchets and the back rail of the chaise.

One major manufacturer recalled over 50,000 chaises that had been sold with plastic headrest ratchets, due to nearly 200 serious injuries that occurred because they were breaking. Injuries on record with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission include:

1. Severe lacerations of fingers
2. Partial or multiple amputations of fingers
3. Fractured, crushed and pinched fingers
4. Back injuries
5. At least one skull fracture

These particular plastic ratchets were recalled years ago, and probably are no longer in the marketplace in any significant quantities. We are aware of no current recalls from any other factories, but these issues remain a major concern for associations who have plastic ratchets. Many different types of brittle old plastic ratchets are still in use today, and pose a significant liability for the associations who have them. These will eventually, break, and may cause serious injuries.

Recently we dealt with three condominium associations and one beach-rental concession facing this issue. All four have replaced their old furniture. If your association has chaise lounges with plastic "teeth" you should closely inspect every one of them for cracks and breaks; also for color and texture changes. New and functional plastic ratchets usually are smooth to the touch, have a translucent appearance, and are pliable and flexible. Older ones in danger of breaking often feel rough and gritty, and become more opaque and stiff. Those should be replaced.

Check your headrests for proper movement

You should also check your chaise headrests and ratchet support assemblies for side-to-side wobble. They are designed to go up and down, not side-to-side. If these moving parts have much side-to-side motion, you should look closely at the hardware that attaches these pieces to the frame. You may find bent or broken parts that need to be repaired or replaced. Also check for worn out holes where the hardware goes into the frame. These are safety issues that may cause injuries.

Walloped-out holes in the frame can be repaired temporarily by replacing the bent hardware with new one-quarter inch stainless steel bolts and Lock nuts, and adding stainless steel washers over the holes to strengthen the assembly and frame. The permanent fix is a refinishing function: weld the holes closed and re-drill them.

Options for correcting broken plastic headrest ratchets

There are four options that address ratchets that are stiff, opaque and discolored or feel gritty and rough.

1. Aftermarket plastic ratchets are available, and should be relatively safe to use for two to three years or more. The original ones are generally riveted onto the frame. These rivets have to be drilled out, and the new ratchets attached with new rivets or with stainless steel screws if you don't have a pop-rivet gun. Screws generally don't work as well, because they have a tendency to loosen and need to be watched and tightened as needed. The holes in the new ratchets likely will not match up to the holes in your headrest, and you'll have to drill new holes.
2. Another option offered by some furniture factories is to replace the entire support assembly with welded aluminum ratchet teeth. The manufacturer will need one of yours to duplicate the measurements properly, and will probably provide all new hardware to mount the new one. This represents a permanent solution, and may be a worthwhile investment if your chaises otherwise are of excellent quality and condition, or if you have budget constraints but want safer furniture quickly.
3. Re-strap or refinish your chaises and let the refinisher repair or replace the plastic ratchets or the entire ratchet support assembly as needed.
4. Buy new chaises with modern design and up-to-date safety features.

One of the places in which people will congregate most freely is the association swimming pool and clubhouse area, yet this area often is last on the list of budget planning. Often, little attention is paid to details like cracks in straps, stiff plastic ratchets on chaises, bending or breaking frames, and worn glides, until these things begin to break very obviously and become unsightly or cause damage to the furniture or the deck. A greater concern is that they may cause injuries. It is very wise for associations to have regularly scheduled maintenance inspections of their pool furniture straps and frame integrity, and to act sooner rather than later to correct any deficiencies. The cheapest option is not necessarily the best option: you should look closely at the safety and construction details. Being aware of the issues is one half the battles; the other half is to stay alert and be proactive, rather than reactive. The pool and clubhouse area is meant to be a place of carefree recreation and fellowship. Our wish for you is: "May it be so."

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