

The use and management of spa baths on houseboats

Updated February 2019

EPA 914/19: This information sheet summarises the requirements for the safe use and appropriate management of spa baths on houseboats.

Introduction

It is important for owners of houseboats to ensure a safe, clean and enjoyable environment for hirers at all times. This fact sheet is designed to outline the appropriate use and management of spa baths on houseboats for owners, managers and hirers. By keeping the spa bath clean and well maintained, houseboat hirers can be assured that their use of the spa is a safe and enjoyable experience.

What is a spa bath?

A spa bath is a water-retaining structure of less than 680-litre capacity used for bathing or recreation, and fitted with equipment for creating turbulent heated water. In general, spa baths (unlike spa pools) do not have disinfection or reticulating filtration system, and are designed to be emptied after each use like a conventional bath.

What are the health risks associated with spa baths?

Spa baths do not have a disinfection or filtration system so any dirt, body fats and other contaminants that are not drained out can accumulate within the piping system and promote the growth of micro-organisms such as *Pseudomonas*, *Staphylococcus*, *Mycobacteria* and *Legionella*, leading to:

- skin, ear and eye infections
- gastro-intestinal infections (stomach upset)
- serious or fatal respiratory infections such as Legionnaire's Disease.

Newborns, people with skin conditions, the elderly and individuals who are immuno-compromised are particularly at risk of infection from bacteria that may be found in spa bath water.

How do I clean my spa bath?

A physical and chemical clean is required on a regular basis to remove the accumulation of fats, oils and other debris. A commercially formulated cleaning and degreasing solution with a sanitising/disinfecting action specifically manufactured for use in spas is recommended to ensure the pipes remain hygienically clean between uses.

When used according to the manufacturer's directions, the cleaning solution should remove all fats and debris adhered to the piping.

It is very important to also physically clean the spa regularly including any filters, pumps, pipe-work, or lint strainers to ensure they do not become a source of contamination. This can be done with a scrubbing brush or specialised products recommended by the manufacturer.

It is recommended that the spa bath be drained after each use and fully cleaned, degreased and sanitised after each hire, and at least once a week.

All spa bath water is classed as greywater and should under no circumstances be discharged back to the river without having been treated to EPA discharge guidelines. Spa bath water may be contained on board for later disposal at appropriate waste water disposal stations [River vessel waste disposal options, edition no.2¹](#)

Outdoor spas should be fitted with a cover to prevent leaves, dirt, pollen, insects or small animals falling into the spa.

Can I use river water to fill a spa bath?

It is recommended that water for use in spa baths be of potable water quality. It is not necessary to disinfect potable water for use in spa baths.

Where it is not possible to use potable water, untreated river water may be used. It should be noted that as river water is untreated, there may be potential risks associated with its use, particularly where it is subject to heating and prolonged use (greater than 20 minutes) in spa baths. To mitigate these potential risks, river water can be filtered and manually dosed with chlorine prior to use as long as the appropriate chemical levels are maintained. Chlorine levels in the spa bath should be manually tested before the spa bath is used, and levels should be maintained within the range of 2–4mg/L (ppm) when in use.

No matter what the source of water, all spa baths should be used for a maximum of 20 minutes, drained (according to EPA greywater guidelines) after each use and cleaned regularly as advised.

What are the recommendations for safe use of spa baths?

To ensure the spa bath is used safely (regardless of the source of the water):

- spend no longer than 20 minutes in the spa at any one time
- keep your head above water and do not ingest the water
- actively discourage nose blowing, spitting and urinating in the spa
- heated water should not exceed 38°C
- always supervise children using the spa bath

Do **NOT** use a spa bath if:

- you have an open cut or wound, feel unwell or are pregnant
- the water is dirty
- you are under the influence of alcohol or are taking drugs that cause drowsiness
- disinfectant has been used and too high a dose has been applied

The spa bath water should be emptied after each use and the spa bath cleaned and sanitised regularly.

What are the responsibilities of the owner?

Owners and managers of houseboats for hire are required to provide a safe and hygienic environment by ensuring the spa bath is installed correctly, kept clean and is well maintained at all times.

Spa baths should be installed according to the Australian Standard 3861 so that the water completely drains from the pump and pipe-work when released from the bath. This will minimise the amount of stagnant water left in the system that may support microbial growth.

¹ https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/files/477475_riverboat.pdf

All used spa bath water is greywater and must be treated or contained according to the EPA greywater management requirements under the [Code of practice for vessel and facility management \(marine and inland waters\)](#). All spa bath water is classed as greywater and should under no circumstances be discharged back to the river without having been treated to EPA discharge guidelines.

Information should be provided to houseboat hirers about the safe and proper use of the spa bath. An appropriate cleaning procedure and schedule should be documented and provided at the beginning of each hire, remembering that the spa bath should be drained after each use and cleaned after each hire (and at least once a week). A cleaning solution should be provided for the hirer to use where the hire period is greater than seven days.

If the spa bath water is to be disinfected prior to use, the hirer should be advised to measure and record disinfectant levels before use. All chemicals should be clearly labelled, and stored properly and safely.

What are the responsibilities of the houseboat hirer?

Houseboat hirers should familiarise themselves with the safe use of the spa bath, and the operation and cleaning procedures to ensure they understand how to use and maintain the equipment safely. Most importantly the spa bath is to be drained after each use, and cleaned once a week where the houseboat is hired for more than seven days.

Spa pools are designed to be used for recreation and have disinfection and filtration systems which kill harmful micro-organisms and remove body fats and oils from the water. The use and maintenance of public spa pools is governed by legislation.

Chlorinated water from spa pools is not to be discharged back into the river.

Useful websites

Further information on public health related matters can be found at <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au>

Further information regarding spa bath water discharge and greywater can be found at <https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/greywater>

Further information

Legislation

[Online legislation](#) is freely available. Copies of legislation are available for purchase from:

Service SA Government Legislation Outlet
Adelaide Service SA Centre
108 North Terrace
Adelaide SA 5000

Telephone: 13 23 24
Facsimile: (08) 8204 1909
Website: shop.service.sa.gov.au
Email: ServiceSAcustomerservice@sa.gov.au

General information

Environment Protection Authority
GPO Box 2607
Adelaide SA 5001

Telephone: (08) 8204 2004
Facsimile: (08) 8124 4670
Freecall: 1800 623 445 (country)
Website: <https://www.epa.sa.gov.au>
Email: epainfo@sa.gov.au
