

No drain on the environment

by Alex Bloom - Aug. 28, 2008 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

One Valley company is the latest to dive headfirst into cleaning dirty pool water rather than draining it - an effort its managers say will help owners keep the environment clean and save money.

AquaLabz is the second company to say its product will help you avoid draining water filled with chemicals and calcium.

It's so new that many pool stores say they know little about it, but the entrepreneurs say their efforts are gaining steam.

AquaLabz's EcoKlear service uses reverse osmosis to filter calcium and dissolved solvents out of pools to help their owners get clearer, bluer water without draining the 10,000 to 15,000 gallons of water most pools hold. EcoKlear service started in December and has filtered almost 1 million gallons of water. The company has applied for a patent, a process which takes two to three years to be completed.

EcoKlear follows Calsaway Pool Services of Tempe, which started filtering water in the Valley in 2005. The company has been featured on national television for its product, which initially used a mix of

chemicals to create a white calcium carbonate.

Ken Scheer, Calsaway vice president, said that the company now offers a service similar to EcoKlear's.

While the two companies are competitors, they also are trying to raise awareness of the same thing: Other ways exist to deal with hard and chemically filled water rather than draining a pool.

Discussions about pool care resonate in Arizona. The state ranked No. 4 in the country in the number of inground pools with 290,431 in 2006, according to the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals.

The EcoKlear service is equivalent in price to draining a pool, said Maximilian Biberger, AquaLabz president. But with EcoKlear, helping the environment is economically viable.

"People will be green if it fits their checkbook," Biberger said. "We deliver at an economic price where people are happy with it."

Owners have to drain pools when levels of calcium, total dissolved solvents or cyanuric acid, commonly known as stabilizer, become too high. Before Calsaway and EcoKlear, the only way to correct those problems was to

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drain, which can be time-consuming and risky, besides wasteful.

Pools can be drained only when the temperature is below 90 degrees because the combination of temperature and pressure can crack plaster. It's considered a drain on the environment, too, because of the wasted water.

An average-size pool takes EcoKlear's reverse-osmosis system three to four days to clean, said Shad Sanders, AquaLabz general manager.

"(It filters out) all the old chemicals, all the calcium, all the nitrates, phosphates, ammonias," Sanders said. "Basically, all the junk out of the water that's been put into the water over the previous two to three years."

Biberger said an EcoKlear filter uses about as much power as a hair dryer, which does not have a significant effect on an electricity bill. The filter removes about 15 percent of the water, but auto-refill systems in pools can keep up.

AquaLabz then adds chemicals to balance the water.

"We can actually irrigate the lawn or flower beds with the waste water," Sanders said.

AquaLabz started in 2005 with the

AquaVizor, a floating device that monitors pool temperature and chemistry data. Through private investment, the company raised capital and developed the EcoKlear filter. Some pool-servicing companies now are using EcoKlear with their clients.

"This is a way that we can remove the minerals, remove the problems that we have for the customer without damaging the pool," said Blaine Benson, general manager of Phoenix's B&L Pools.

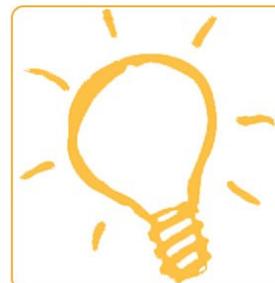
B&L services about 350 accounts each week. Benson said he has recommended EcoKlear to about 20 customers.

"The only question we've ever had is how fast can we get it done," Benson said.

Calsaway Pool Services Inc. launched in 2005 in Tempe with its company slogan of "Never drain your pool again."

Calsaway technicians use two types of systems to treat pools. The most common uses a trailer-mounted system that filters water through two hoses. Calsaway's Scheer said that the trailer-mounted system is similar to EcoKlear and that Calsaway has used it for 10 months. The second type, a mix of chemicals to create a white calcium-carbonate solid that sinks to the bottom of the pool, is used solely for "green pools."

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Biberger said of his competitor's product: "It works. . . . They have a **technology** that can take calcium out; we have a product that can take calcium out."

The companies have not yet created a big footprint in the market.

Shasta Pools & Spas has heard of EcoKlear, but it would not go so far as to endorse the product.

"We're still conducting our own testing to decide whether or not any of those companies are something we would be interested in recommending to our pool-supply stores or something like that," said John Neely, Shasta senior marketing manager.

Jim Cich, CEO of Paddock Pools, said no one at his company was aware of EcoKlear.

EcoKlear treated the pool at Chris Hobbs' home in Gilbert last March. Hobbs said his pool had a low pH level, a high cyanuric-acid level and a high number of total dissolved solvents.

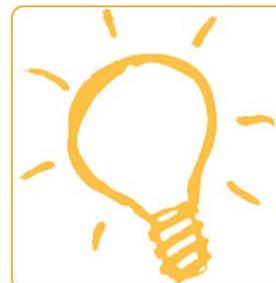
"I follow up on pool forums and online Web sites for pools, and they said the only way to get rid of those things is to drain it," Hobbs said.

Hobbs didn't want to waste water by

draining the pool, but he was uncertain whether EcoKlear would work. He had the water checked before and after using EcoKlear.

"I had the water independently checked, and it came out to be perfect," Hobbs said.

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