



The Promise of Borates

New approaches amid chlorine/bromine shortage

BY THERESA BOEHL

THOUGH IT HASN'T HIT EVERY CORNER OF THE HOT TUB INDUSTRY EQUALLY, the granule chlorine/bromine shortage — due in part to an August fire at the BioLab chemical production facility in Westlake, Louisiana — has industry professionals on high alert. These common sanitizers are a must-have for those who sell hot tubs or supply chemicals for hot tub maintenance. But if the chemicals become scarce, some may have to come up with a Plan B.

Steve Berens, CEO and co-founder at Clear Comfort in Boulder, Colorado, says there's a lot of uncertainty about when the shortage will hit and how hard it will be.

"Trichlor specifically is going to be short this year by a considerable amount," he says. "A lot of people have numbers all over the board."

Rob Robinson, general manager at Blackthorne Spas in Salinas, California, has seen an impact, although as a BioGuard dealer, his company secured a large amount of chlorine to avoid disruption. However, supplies have been slightly squeezed from time to time.

"We've run out of smaller bottles or even our medium-sized bottles [of chlorine]," he says. "And that's never happened in my career before, but we were able to overcome it."

Limited supply definitely poses challenges, says John Bokor, director of sales at Haviland Pool & Spa Products in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "If supply was not an issue...our spa brands would certainly grow exponentially this year," he says.

Dealing with a shortage may mean reassessing current chemical use and exploring options to make scarce resources last longer. For example, borates are

reputed to have a number of benefits, including reducing the amount of chlorine needed.

For stabilizing pH and alkalinity and allowing chlorine to do its job better, borates are hard to beat, says Myles Berger, marketing manager at Hot Tub Central in Toms River, New Jersey. Reduced scaling, improved water softness and a noticeable clarity are other benefits.

"It really does give [the water] a nice little shine," he says, making it "easy on the eyes."

Robinson uses SpaGuard's Enhanced Shock product, which contains borates, and he's noticed it helps make the water cleaner and clearer.

"Over time, you notice the water pH becomes a little more stable, which is a big benefit to customers, because who wants massive swings or even small swings [of pH]?" he says.

Bokor says borates "absolutely" help reduce the need for chlorine, though he stresses that nothing replaces the need to sanitize recreational water. He says borates do more than improve water softness and help balance pH; they also help to chelate calcium, keeping heaters cleaner and reducing scale formation.

Some remain skeptical about the effectiveness of borates, however — at least when it comes to the chemical's relationship with chlorine.

"There may be some reduction of chlorine usage with borates, but we have not seen any third-party studies to substantiate this theory," says Scott Nichols, regional sales

"For stabilizing pH and alkalinity and allowing chlorine to do its job better, borates are hard to beat."

Myles Berger
marketing manager,
Hot Tub Central

manager at EasyCare Products USA, in Fresno, California.

That perceived lack of empirical evidence keeps some professionals from relying too heavily on borates as a means to cutting back on chlorine. Nichols says his company prefers to promote its Spatec and Pooltec brands as products that dramatically reduce the need for chlorine.

For Berens, one of the challenges with relying on borates is that, while anecdotal evidence abounds, hard data on the usefulness of borates in practice isn't readily available.

"It really has been [that] everyone's got their own borate cocktail, and they're trying to figure it out," he says. His company has recommended customers try borates alongside its AOP disinfection system, designed to cut chlorine usage by 30% to 50%. That can lead to better pH control in certain geographical areas, he says: "We're seeing very positive benefits from some of them. Others have not had the benefits, but we don't know if everything's being done in a prescribed way that makes sense."

Bokor, on the other hand, says there have been many studies on borates throughout the years, and that he likes to refer to the original EPA registration for the company's pool product Proteam Supreme. That document lists "reduced chlorine consumption" as a benefit of the product, which contains borates.

While Berger personally sees the benefits of borates, he admits they can be a hard sell for the hot tub industry, due in part to long-held beliefs about their appropriateness for this particular application.

"A lot of it is an old-school mentality that borates are for pools and not needed in hot tubs," he says. He says borates might benefit customers who want to keep their water in their tubs for as long as possible and suggests introducing borates to customers at the beginning of their hot tub ownership, helping solve issues early on with pH and alkalinity.

For now, as the chlorine/bromine shortage looms, each company will have to decide which chemicals and systems will help them and their costumers avoid disruption.

At EasyCare, Nichols plans to keep it simple amid a flurry of alternative approaches. He sticks to the basics: pH, alkalinity, conditioner and sanitizer, a simple algacide program when needed and, "of course, proper circulation and filtration [to] provide a pleasurable experience." ■

✉ Questions or comments on this article? Email us!
editorial@kendrickcontent.com



Celebrating
25 grateful years
of support and
innovation from
employees, reps,
dealers, vendors,
customers — we
couldn't have
done it without
all of you. For
every story you
share on **Circle**
of Celebration
at frog25.com,
we'll donate \$25.

CELEBRATING
25 YEARS
OF INNOVATION

