

## Sticky Material or “Pool Tar” on Vinyl Pool Liners

Issued October 22, 2001  
Revised April 5, 2005

Many studies were performed on a phenomenon known as pool tar where a sticky substance would form in the pool on the surface of the vinyl or would find its way into skimmers. There can be several possible causes for this phenomenon.

One cause can be linked to the plasticizer, or softening agent, used by all manufacturers to impart the softness and necessary physical properties of the plastic that make it function as a swimming pool liner. It has been observed that a small portion of the plasticizer in the liner can migrate to the surface of the liner after the first winterization following installation. It does not tend to recur again in subsequent seasons. Generally, this may be caused by the high amount of chemicals added to the pool as part of the winterization procedure along with the lack of circulation over the winter. To help prevent this phenomenon, the installer should always recommend care is taken to thoroughly circulate any chemicals added during the winterization process before closing the pool and shutting down the circulation system. Usually, this material will dissipate once the pool is opened, the water is shocked, circulated and brought up to temperature. The owner should not attempt to remove the sticky material by using aggressive cleaners or abrasive scrubbers that can permanently damage the printed liner surface.

A second family causes can be from the introduction of chemicals that interact with different substances commonly found in or used in pools. Interactions can occur with certain algaecides and an abundance of dirt or debris in the pool such as grass clippings or leaves. Using high levels of algaecides in combination with high levels of chlorine can also cause reactions resulting in sticky substances which may build up in the automatic chlorinator and then be distributed throughout the pool. Some of these algaecides, known as “quat” algaecides may contain warnings on the label about mixing with high levels of chlorine.

A third possibility has been seen in the past several years with the increased usage of sunscreens and other lotions. Residue from sunscreens typically builds up on the tile area of the liner above the waterline but may also accumulate in skimmers or filters. Regular cleaning of this material on the surface of the vinyl liner with non-abrasive pool cleaners is recommended before the material becomes hard and accumulates other dirt and debris.

The best way to prevent this and other problems is to establish proper care and maintenance routines. Do not use cleaners that are designed for other surfaces. Do not depend on shocking or using large doses of chemicals to bring a pool's water chemistry back in line on a regular basis. Consistent and proper use of pool chemicals is very important both to the life of the pool liner and to the health and safety of the people enjoying the pool! Please refer to your installer's care instructions or to the [www.chemicalfilmfabrics.com](http://www.chemicalfilmfabrics.com) website for more information on the proper care of vinyl swimming pool liners.

Yvette Ploskonka  
Technical Director