

UNITING THE POOL INDUSTRY IN TEXAS

By Amy Willer

THEY SAY EVERYTHING IS bigger in Texas, and the pool industry is no exception. Texas consistently ranks as one of the top three states for residential inground pool construction, residential aboveground pool installation, commercial pool installation, and hot tub sales. But for such a large state with such a diverse workforce and a high level of jurisdictional independence, it is more important than ever that the Texas pool and hot tub industry has a unified voice.

That's where the Texas Pool & Spa Coalition (TPSC) comes in. Originally formed as the Aquatic Professionals Education Council (APEC), the organization joined the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) in

2019 as part of the larger merger between the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals (APSP) and the National Swimming Pool Foundation (NSPF).

Since then, TPSC has taken an active role in promoting and protecting the pool and hot tub industry throughout the state. "TPSC has the government's attention," explains TPSC Chairman Rick Hagan, national sales for Outdoor Living Products for POOLCORP. "We have more and more legislators reaching out to us for our thoughts." During the 2023 Texas Regular Legislative Session, for example, TPSC tracked and engaged on 12 industry-related pieces of legislation, and more than half went TPSC's way.

Here are some of TPSC's biggest wins in recent years.

ESSENTIAL SERVICE

When the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders went into effect in early 2020, TPSC worked to ensure pool professionals were considered "essential" and able to keep working. Each municipality was responsible for its own regulations, so Hagan and other TPSC members would spend hours every day speaking to city councils. "We explained that it was a sanitary issue," says Hagan. If pools across the state were left untreated, that could lead to bacteria, viruses, and other waterborne issues.

"Eventually, with help from our lobbyists and the Governor's group, we got a letter that specifically said pool guys were an essential service throughout the state," explains Hagan.

This helped keep the industry afloat during the pandemic.

CODE ADOPTION

Shortly after TPSC became part of PHTA, there was a big push for statewide adoption of the 2018 International Swimming Pool and Spa Code (ISPSC). However, there was a lack of funding as well as a lack of administrative oversight. TPSC was able to raise some donations from pool builders in the state, but it was not enough. When PHTA stepped in with its government relations team to support TPSC's efforts, it made a huge difference. As of July 2023, various versions of the ISPSC have been adopted by 216 jurisdictions throughout Texas. In fact, Texas leads the country in jurisdictional adoption. "You can't argue with the success TPSC has had with PHTA backing and support," Hagan says.

Additionally, TPSC is working across the state to raise awareness of ANSI/APSP/ICC-13 2017 American National Standard for Water Conservation



From the Capitol Rotunda, L-R: Andrew Ragland, Rick Hagan, Addam Barrow, Texas State Senator Donna Campbell, Charlie Claffey and Jason Davidson.

Efficiency in Pools, Spas, Portable Spas and Swim Spas as it relates to drought. This standard covers methods and technologies that increase the efficient use and conservation of water for both residential and public pools and spas. When adopted by a jurisdiction or state, the standard has the force of law.

LICENSURE

All Texas pool and spa service

technicians are required to have a Residential Appliance Installer License (RAIL). This includes anyone who performs electrical work on a pool, including pumps, lights, blowers, heaters, and control systems. Those performing electrical work without a RAIL are subject to fines starting at \$2,000. The Texas Department of Licensing & Regulation (TDLR) is the agency that oversees this license.

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In the Texas Chamber, L-R: Rick Hagan, Addam Barrow, Andrew Ragland and Charlie Claffey.

In 2023, TPSC partnered with TDLR on a two-part awareness campaign about RAIL. “Having licensed professionals keeps the integrity in the industry,” Hagan says. The industry-facing campaign reminded pool professionals that they need to get licensed and offered resources on how to prepare for the exam and how to renew. The consumer-facing campaign explained to pool owners the importance of hiring licensed professionals.

FEDERAL PROGRAMMING

Last year, the U.S. Department of Energy issued guidance for state implementation of the Home Energy Rebate Programs included within the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). PHTA has been closely monitoring this program in which certain energy-efficient appliances would qualify for the rebates. Because there are so many pool owners in Texas, TPSC encouraged its members to contact the Texas State Energy Conservation Office to ask for swimming pool pumps and replacement pump motors, pool controls and timers, and heat pump pool heaters to qualify for rebates in this program. This could lead to great cost savings for Texas pool owners, create greater demand for pool equipment upgrades, and, in turn, lead to a reduction of millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide.

UNIFYING BUILDERS AND CODE OFFICIALS

In the last several years, TPSC has developed close partnerships

with both the Building Officials Association of Texas (BOAT) and the Texas Association of Builders (TAB). Working with both organizations has led to better alignment of laws and regulations regarding homebuilding and residential pool building as well as more consistent enforcement. TPSC is now a member of BOAT and TAB and has attended their annual conferences the last two years. In addition to having a booth at both shows, TPSC and PHTA have offered educational sessions on proper pool construction taught by GENESIS Engineering Faculty Chair Terry Brannon, P.E., as well as classes on the ISPSC.

DROUGHT

In 2022, TPSC and PHTA launched the “Let’s Pool Together” Texas campaign, based on a similar drought campaign PHTA and the California Pool & Spa Association (CPSA) developed in California. “Let’s Pool Together” offers resources for both pool owners and industry professionals on how proper pool and hot tub usage and maintenance can conserve water in times of drought.

During TPSC’s last visit to the Texas Capitol in Austin, members met with the state’s drought committee to discuss concerns with the water supply. Austin, in particular, does not have the water it needs to take care of its current population, and the city is only expected to continue growing over the next 10 years.

TPSC also drafted letters to

government officials that TPSC members could personalize and send to their local representatives to oppose limits on pool building and filling during times of drought.

ONE INDUSTRY, ONE VOICE

Hagan believes that the most important role TPSC plays is representing the diverse industry as a unified voice. In addition to TPSC, there are three regional PHTA Chapters in the state: Central Texas (Greater Austin), Greater Houston, and North Texas. One representative from each chapter sits on the TPSC Board. It is also important to Hagan that the TPSC Board has members from all facets of the industry: builders, service technicians, manufacturers, retailers and distributors.

TPSC meets virtually once a month, to give the board and members an opportunity to discuss the latest industry-related happenings across the state. It is an open meeting and the public is invited to attend. When there is an upcoming election or an important piece of legislation coming through, state representatives and senators also attend the meetings to share updates from the legislative side.

TPSC also works closely with PHTA to drive membership, education, and certification. The 2023 PHTA Chairman of the Board, Charlie Claffey, has also been a longtime TPSC member. According to Hagan, Claffey “realized what TPSC needed to do and that we needed to grow. He showed TPSC members the value of being committed to PHTA.” Claffey — who, according to Hagan, hasn’t missed a monthly TPSC meeting in three years — played an important part in explaining how PHTA at the national level is also helping TPSC at the state level.

Because TPSC is part of PHTA, all TPSC members receive the full benefits of PHTA membership. Texas currently has the largest number of PHTA members by state, but Hagan is hopeful to expand that lead. His goal is to reach a total of 500 PHTA member companies in Texas this year.

To learn more about TPSC and get involved in local advocacy efforts, visit txpsc.org. ~

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