

CONSUMER CONNECTION



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YARD REIMAGINED

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STATE OF CALIFORNIA



DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

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CONSUMER CONNECTION

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#ASKDCA

YOU HAVE QUESTIONS? WE'VE GOT ANSWERS!

Matt Woodcheke

Consumer Connection staff

Got a question about your contractor, dentist, doctor, cosmetologist, or one of the many other professionals licensed and regulated by the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA)? Maybe you'd like to know more about how DCA helps consumers make wise purchasing decisions by informing them about the laws that protect them? Now is your chance to ask!

Submit your question via email to **publicaffairs@dca.ca.gov** and it may be answered in a future issue of *Consumer Connection*.

Please note: We are not able to answer questions regarding the status of a license application, complaint, or investigation. Some questions have been edited for clarity or brevity.



I'M HAVING MY KITCHEN REDONE AT HOME, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT KIND OF CONTRACTOR I SHOULD HIRE.

If your job is valued at \$500 or more in both materials and labor, you'll want to make sure the person you hire is a licensed contractor. Contractors with a Class B general building license usually oversee projects and coordinate the specific licensed subcontractors for a job. Specialty or subcontractors usually are hired to perform a single job. For example, if you need only roofing or plumbing work, you would want to hire a contractor licensed in that specialty—the roofing classification is C-39; plumbing is C-36.

A general building contractor also may contract for some or all of the specialty work, but must hold a specialty license for that work or actually have a specialty contractor do the work. The only exception is if the job requires more than two types of work on a building. Then it is appropriate for a licensed general building contractor to contract for and oversee the entire project. For example, if your kitchen remodeling will involve plumbing, electrical, and carpentry work under one contract, you should hire a licensed "B" general building contractor. Under these circumstances, a "B" contractor may perform all of the work on a building, or subcontract parts of the job to contractors with specialty licenses.

You can build a personalized list of licensed contractors in your area with the "Find My Licensed Contractor" feature on the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) website (www.cslb.ca.gov). That's where you can also check out the license status of contractors before you hire them.



I'M HOSTING A CHARITY BOXING EVENT. DOES MY EVENT NEED TO BE LICENSED?

It might! There are two avenues that will allow a charity or nonprofit event to be held without running afoul of the laws and regulations of the California State Athletic Commission. The first avenue is to obtain an amateur promoter's license from the Commission. The second avenue is to obtain an amateur sanction from USA Boxing.

Any event held without either a Commission license or a USA Boxing sanction is illegal under California's Business and Professions and Penal codes. If you have questions about how promoters, managers, and athletes can obtain licensure in California, and how charity boxing events can be organized and approved, contact the Commission at www.dca.ca.gov/csac.



I WANT TO MAKE MY FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS IN ADVANCE, BUT I'M NOT SURE IF I SHOULD PAY IN ADVANCE. CAN YOU HELP?

Prepaying spares your survivors the burden of arranging payment while planning your funeral. It also keeps you in control of the costs and ensures that your wishes can and will be carried out. Prepayment methods include life insurance, funeral insurance, funeral trusts, and bank-held trusts or savings accounts. You may wish to consult an attorney and Medicare or Medicaid, if applicable, before you decide whether to pay for preneed expenses up front.

This is a personal decision that is completely up to the consumer. To avoid a large lump sum payment, some establishments offer payment plans for preneed arrangements. But remember, any arrangements (signed contracts, etc.) or end-of-life decisions should always be shared with your loved ones so that when the time comes, they know where to find the information to ensure that your wishes are followed.

The Cemetery and Funeral Bureau offers a guide to planning your arrangements in advance at its website, www.cfb.ca.gov.




MY CAR NEEDS EXPENSIVE REPAIRS TO PASS SMOG CHECK AND I DON'T KNOW IF I SHOULD PUT MONEY INTO IT OR CUT MY LOSSES. WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND?

The Bureau of Automotive Repair's (BAR) Consumer Assistance Program (CAP) offers a pair of options to help you repair or retire your vehicle. Participation is based on meeting eligibility requirements and the availability of funds each fiscal year.

Under the first option, you may be eligible to receive up to \$500 in emission-related repairs. To participate, you must meet specific income and program requirements, and the repairs must be performed at one of over 2,000 participating Smog Check stations statewide.

Your other choice is to retire the vehicle from operation rather than repair it. Income-eligible consumers who meet program requirements may receive \$1,500—all other eligible consumers may receive \$1,000. The vehicle must be retired at a BAR-contracted auto dismantler.

To review eligibility requirements for both CAP options and to apply online, visit BAR's website, www.bar.ca.gov. 





EDUCATION

MORE STUDENT PROTECTION

NEW LAWS FOCUS ON FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

Matt Woodcheke
Consumer Connection staff

As student enrollment in California for-profit schools increases, state regulators are stepping up scrutiny and providing students with more protection and information.

On January 1, a quartet of new laws went into effect that impact students of California's for-profit schools. Some are an extension of existing protections, others offer new safeguards, and two aim to put money back into the pockets of students who were victims of school closures.

"California is leading the way in protections afforded to students of for-profit schools, whether they're considering attending, currently attending, or victims of a closure," said Dr. Michael Marion, chief of the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE), the regulator of the for-profit college industry in California. "This legislation package is a welcome addition to our arsenal of consumer protection laws."



ASSEMBLY BILL 1340 (CHIU, 2019)

Existing law requires for-profit schools to submit an annual report to BPPE containing information related to educational programs offered, including program costs, graduation rates, and post-graduation job placement rates. BPPE makes this information available to consumers so they may make an informed decision when selecting a for-profit school.

AB 1340 requires schools to include data on loan debt in the annual report. This will protect students by providing them insight to the level of debt they can expect at the end of their school program.

“AB 1340 will protect Californians—particularly low-income students of color and veteran students—from overpriced and ineffective career training programs by providing critical data to prospective students and the public on gainful employment outcomes at private for-profit schools in California,” said the bill’s author, Assembly Member David Chiu.



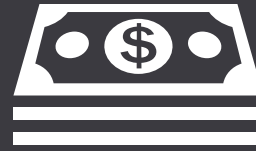
AB 1344 (BAUER-KAHAN, 2019)

AB 1344 overhauls existing law regulating out-of-state for-profit schools that enroll California students in online programs. Prior to the bill becoming law, such schools had to register with BPPE and pay into the state’s Student Tuition Recovery Fund (STRF), which relieves students’ economic loss caused by school closures.

Previously, the state did not have the authority to reject an institution or revoke its registration if the state determined the institution posed a risk to California students.

That changes with AB 1344. Now, out-of-state for-profit schools must report to California if any other state or the federal government has levied disciplinary action against the school—factors BPPE can consider when granting approval. BPPE may also place approved out-of-state schools on probationary status, or revoke authorization to enroll California students.

“This bill would ensure that all higher education students in California have the same protections, regardless of whether they enroll at a school physically located within California or not, and would require any institution that enrolls a student residing in California to comply with all state requirements,” according to the bill’s author, Assembly Member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan.



AB 1346 (MEDINA, 2019)

Perhaps the most sweeping piece of for-profit legislation passed into law in 2019 was Assembly Member Jose Medina’s bill which expands the eligibility for reimbursement from STRF to students who attended a Corinthian College location in California, including Everest, Heald, and WyoTech, on or after January 1, 2010. Previous legislation applied only to Corinthian students enrolled as late as 2014.

The law also allows students of closed for-profit schools to recover losses from STRF beyond tuition expenses, including any expenses incurred by the student as a result of the school closure, such as transcript fees or the cost of services related to debt relief, and expenses incurred in connection with their attendance—potentially housing, transportation, and childcare costs.

“This way, these students won’t be subject to demoralizing debt collection and lawsuits from private student loan collectors,” Medina said.

BPPE’s Office of Student Assistance and Relief (OSAR) is working with former Corinthian students on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility for reimbursement.

“If you are a former Corinthian College student and you’re not sure if you qualify for reimbursement, or if you tried before and weren’t eligible, please contact OSAR so we can see if you’re eligible under the terms of AB 1346,” said Scott Valverde, chief of OSAR.



SENATE BILL 63 (HERTZBERG, 2019)

In 2018, thousands of California students were impacted by the unplanned closures of Brightwood Colleges and Art Institute schools across the state. SB 63 provides relief to those students, ensuring they can seek student loan debt forgiveness without it counting as taxable income on their California tax return.

According to Sen. Robert Hertzberg, the law ensures that students impacted by an abrupt closure aren’t penalized for the failure of a for-profit college chain.

“This bill ensures that federal loan debt assistance is not considered gross income for tax purposes,” Hertzberg said. ☐





HEALTH CARE

THE POWER OF PHYSICAL THERAPY

HOW ADVANCES IN PT HELPED A SKATER STAY ON THE ICE

Cheri Gyuro

Consumer Connection staff

A pair of blades scrape across the ice, creating cut patterns and swirls of frozen powder. Debbie Kleinman of Southern California has been hitting the ice as a high-level figure skater for more than 25 years. She performed all over Nevada and California. Now at age 55, Kleinman is amazed she can complete some basic figure skating moves. Two years ago, she thought she'd have to put on her skate covers for good when her knee blew out. Years of wear and tear to her body brought her skating career-turned-hobby to a screeching halt.

"Everything seemed to hurt my knee," which was bone to bone, meaning all the cartilage was gone, according to Kleinman. She could hardly walk but struggled to accept the reality of knee replacement surgery.

"I wanted to take a holistic approach versus doing a knee replacement," Kleinman said.

Enter the evolution of physical therapy, which has made enormous advances in recent decades. At first, Kleinman was told the only option was a knee replacement, but advances in physical therapy helped her avoid going under the knife.

"What impressed me the most was that it actually worked! I had tried so many other things, including orthotic injections and pain meds, that I felt I was at the end of my rope. My physical therapist had me doing exercises with bands and cushy balls, clams (clam shell exercises), and also did soft-tissue work. I started to feel less pain and stronger around my knee," she said.

Kleinman's hard work and determination is what impressed her physical therapist, Dave Powers, P.T., DPT, M.A., MBA. Powers took a progressive approach to her rehabilitation program, treating her with manual therapy, therapeutic exercises, pool programs, and ice therapy. The goal was to build up the supporting muscles surrounding Kleinman's injury.



At first, Kleinman was told the only option was a knee replacement, but advances in physical therapy helped her avoid going under the knife.

“Our skills and knowledge in being able to evaluate and treat patients have increased over the years. Today, physical therapists graduate with a doctoral degree in physical therapy,” Powers said.

NEW MODES OF TREATMENT

Physical therapy came into the limelight during World War I when reconstruction aides worked with injured soldiers. Poliovirus, a disease that causes paralysis, was also prevalent. The need for physical therapists was in high demand, and those professionals became some of the top providers of care at the time. Since then, physical therapists have increased their level of education and introduced new modalities. This includes hot and cold therapy, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, mechanical force, light therapy, paraffin baths, spinal traction, and many more.

Virtual reality and telehealth are some of today’s top technological advances in physical therapy. Virtual reality isn’t just for gamers—specially designed headsets and sensors are used to program engaging tasks that can improve a patient’s movement as a part of physical therapy treatment. Telehealth is used to help facilitate communication between the therapist and the patient.

Also, on the list for new physical therapy modalities, is focusing on the health and wellness of patients. This expertise helps patients transition from a clinical program to one that allows them to continue to build their strength and endurance. In addition to receiving a doctorate in physical therapy, physical therapists can now obtain specialty certification services in the areas of elderly well-being, women’s health, men’s health, oncology, sports, orthopedics, neurology, and hand rehabilitation.

“There are times when the mind is also addressed. Exercise programs, strength training classes, cardiovascular classes, yoga, Pilates—which can improve core strength and flexibility—are often part of a physical therapist wellness program,” Powers said.

AN INSPIRATION

For Powers, the health and wellness scope of practice has a personal significance that hits close to home. Powers, who’s been practicing for 42 years, became interested in physical therapy while watching his younger brother receive daily treatment from a therapist when they were children.

“Unbeknownst to him, my brother’s therapist became one of my first mentors. I loved what he did with my brother and how he improved the quality of his life. I decided at a very young age that I wanted to be a physical therapist.”

Powers continued the legacy by focusing on the health and well-being of his patients, like Kleinman, who progressed from severely injured to being able to skate at least three times a week.

“He was the best cheerleader, as he would remind me of where I was at when I started when my knee would actually buckle when I would walk. My quality of life is what I was hoping for and now have,” Kleinman said.

Even though Kleinman can’t perform at the same level she did before her injuries, she said she’s in a much better place. She can still gracefully engage in her favorite sport—swirling around the ice on her favorite pair of skates.

If you are seeking help from physical therapists, it’s important to make sure the professional you see is in good standing with the Physical Therapy Board of California by checking their license at <http://search.dca.ca.gov>. ©

EXECUTIVE SPOTLIGHT

KIMBERLY KIRCHMEYER DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS



Kimberly Kirchmeyer has her attention squarely on protecting California consumers and providing better service for the state's 3.5 million licensees after being named last fall as director of the California Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA).

Prior to being appointed in October 2019 by Governor Gavin Newsom, Ms. Kirchmeyer served as executive director of the Medical Board of California (MBC), where she was deputy director from 2011 to 2013.

During her time at MBC, Ms. Kirchmeyer oversaw the successful deployment of the first-in-the-nation Medical Board iPhone app, which alerts consumers on changes to a doctor's profile, including notifications when a doctor's license is suspended, revoked, or placed on probation.

This isn't Ms. Kirchmeyer's first post with DCA: She also was deputy director of Board and Bureau Services at DCA from 2009 to 2011.

We recently spoke with Ms. Kirchmeyer about her background and her vision in her new role.



WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Making sure people have a customer-service mindset. This is a cultural shift in some regards, and it will take time to get that message out. Also, making sure we have the resources to align with the governor's initiative for technological innovation, which also provides more accountability.



WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE CONSUMERS TO KNOW ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT?

I would like consumers to *know* about the Department! We can do all the outreach we want, but it's not until they're in the middle of a bad situation that they look for help—although they may first seek legal help or other resources instead of DCA. I want people to know that DCA has the resources available to help them.



WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR DCA?

I want every employee to understand how critical their role is in meeting DCA's mission of consumer protection and providing great service. To meet this higher standard, we need to ensure that DCA staff have the resources available to support the 37 entities under the DCA umbrella. At the same time, we need to make sure everyone in the Department has all the tools to make all of that happen and, in turn, make sure all the boards and bureaus have what they need from DCA. I want everyone to understand that every decision could potentially be saving a person's life.



WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR BEST MEMORIES OF YOUR PREVIOUS JOBS?

I consider my previous tenure with DCA (2009–11) my golden years: my best years of my career. I had a lot of satisfaction working with the boards and bureaus, providing them with best practices. And in my last job (as executive director of MBC), I really enjoyed working with the board members, helping them bring their priorities to the public.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Always remain positive, always think before you speak or act, and if you see an opportunity, you have to take it. ☺



HEALTH CARE

TAMING THE 'SILENT KILLER'

**HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
IS WIDESPREAD AND
POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS,
BUT YOU CAN REVERSE IT**

Ryan Jones

Consumer Connection staff

Almost everyone has had their blood pressure checked at some point, but how important is blood pressure and why does it matter if it's high or low?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of a person's arteries that transport blood from the heart to other parts of the body. Blood pressure typically rises and falls during the course of a day, but if it stays high for an extended period of time, it can damage the heart and lead to health problems such as heart disease and stroke—leading causes of death in the United States.

High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” because it has no signs or symptoms and because the only way to find out about high blood pressure is to get it checked, therefore many people don't know they have it.

Despite daunting statistics on the prevalence of high blood pressure in the U.S., it is both preventable and treatable—with or without medication—for those who have been diagnosed with the condition.

One in three U.S. adults (about 75 million people) have high blood pressure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and it is the primary or contributing cause in more than 350,000 deaths annually in the U.S.

Only about half (54%) of U.S. adults with high blood pressure have it under control, largely because 20% who have high blood pressure are unaware that they do.

WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN

Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers, and the American Heart Association (AHA) classifies 120/80 as the high limit for “normal.” Systolic (the first number) indicates how much pressure blood is exerting against a person's artery walls when the heart beats. Diastolic (the second number) indicates the degree of pressure blood is exerting against artery walls while the heart is resting.

More attention is usually given to systolic blood pressure as a red-flag risk factor for cardiovascular disease in people 50 and older. For most, according to AHA, systolic blood pressure rises steadily with age due to arteries becoming stiffer, long-term buildup of plaque, and higher incidence of heart and vascular disease.

CONTROLLING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE WITHOUT MEDICATION

For those who are diagnosed with high blood pressure, the prospect of taking medication for the condition may worry some. Although taking medication for high blood pressure is common, there are several lifestyle changes that can lower blood pressure and either eliminate or reduce the need for medication.

Weight loss and improved eating habits. Shedding pounds is one of the most effective ways for controlling blood pressure, according to the Mayo Clinic. For overweight or obese people, even losing a small amount of weight such as 5 pounds can lower blood pressure by a few points.

LOWER IS BETTER

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120 – 129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

American Heart Association



Carrying too much weight puts extra strain on the heart and circulatory system that can lead to serious health problems.

An unhealthy diet, particularly one high in sodium and saturated fats, contributes greatly to high blood pressure. A diet high in salt, calories, and fat will boost blood pressure, but eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can help lower it.

Avoid instinctively reaching for the salt when preparing food or eating out. Just one level teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 milligrams of sodium (AHA recommends no more than 2,300 milligrams per day, with 1,500 being an ideal amount). Flavoring foods with herbs and spices can help cut back on salt. And being a smart shopper by reading labels when shopping can help consumers avoid high-sodium, high-calorie foods and products.

More physical activity. A lack of even moderate exercise can contribute to high blood pressure. Regular physical activity—such as 150 minutes a week or about 30 minutes most days of the week—can lower blood pressure by as much as eight points, according to the Mayo Clinic. It's also important to be consistent with exercise because stopping can cause blood pressure to rise again.

Reducing chronic stress. Everyone gets stressed at certain times, but protracted periods of high stress can contribute to increased blood pressure.

Strategies that can help alleviate stress include: understanding there are some things you cannot change and only focusing on the things that are within your control; not allowing conflicts with family members or friends to


fester—take steps to resolve them; and spending the time at least once a day to sit in a quiet place free of distractions to relax and breathe calmly.

COLLABORATION IS KEY TO TREATMENT

For the millions of Americans battling high blood pressure—especially those who have tried but failed to lower their blood pressure on their own—AHA stresses the importance of establishing a good doctor-patient partnership.

These are recommendations to solidify that relationship and help gain control of high blood pressure:

- Use an annual checkup with a physician to ask about your blood pressure. If a checkup determines it to be high, check your blood pressure regularly between appointments at a pharmacy or at home with a blood pressure monitor. Follow through with recommendations from your doctor.
- Start a log of your blood pressure readings and record any questions that arise to ask your doctor during the next visit.
- Have patience. Significant results to lower blood pressure can take time and possibly multiple or varied strategies.
- What are your biggest obstacles—diet, exercise, physical activity? Let your physician know so he or she can advise you.

When consulting a medical expert, be sure they are licensed and in good standing by checking their license at www.search.dca.ca.gov. 

HOW TO STAY SAFE IN PUBLIC POOLS

CHEMICALS CAN HELP KILL GERMS—BUT BE WARY OF A STRONG CHLORINE ODOR

Michelle McVay-Cave

Consumer Connection staff

Every time you or your loved one takes a dip in a public swimming pool, spa, hot tub, or the like, there is a chance your health may be at risk. You may not have given much thought about who is responsible for maintaining the healthiness of the water you swim in and, in some cases, swallow. How do you know if your favorite public pool is safe to swim in and what can you do to help keep you and your family healthy?

California law requires that operators of public pools and spas follow guidelines set forth in the Swimming Pool Safety Act under the Health and Safety Code for Safe Recreational Water Use.

All 58 California counties have a designated agricultural commissioner who is responsible for the regulatory oversight of public pools and spas. These include pools, spas, and hot tubs operated by health clubs, hotels, apartments, condominium complexes, mobile home parks, homeowner associations, public and private schools, municipalities, water parks, spray parks, swim schools, and swim clubs.

Splashing around in a public pool can be great fun, but the water can also spread germs and inflict swimmers with **recreational water illness** (RWI). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that RWIs are caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in. They are spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or





When you're in a public pool, you share the water and all the germs in it. If you think the smell of chlorine signifies a healthy, clean pool, think again.

aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, spray parks, and interactive fountains.

The most common RWI is diarrhea, which is caused by the germs *cryptosporidium*—crypto for short—and *giardia*. Others include rashes, ear infections, respiratory infections, and other potentially serious illnesses.

Most pools are filled with pesticides and disinfectants such as chlorine (a registered pesticide) to clean contaminants like sweat, skin, lotion, and urine from pool water. According to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, “pesticide” describes many substances used to control pests. “Pests” are organisms (e.g., algae, viruses, and bacteria) that cause damage or economic loss or transmit disease. Swimming pool maintenance services use pesticides to maintain the health of the water and keep it free of pathogens that can cause potentially serious illnesses.

When you're in a public pool, you share the water and all the germs in it. If you think the smell of chlorine signifies a healthy, clean pool, think again. That chlorine odor is not what you think. It is the smell of chemicals that form when the “pesticide” used to disinfect the pool water mixes with urine, feces, sweat, and dirt from the bodies of the swimmers. These chemicals can cause stinging and redness of the eyes, running noses, and coughing.

Chemicals such as chlorine and bromine are added to pool water to kill germs, but they take a few minutes to work. When used properly, these chemicals can kill most germs to keep the water safe for swimmers. However, there are some germs such as crypto—the germ that causes diarrhea—that can survive in pool water for several days, even in water that has been treated properly. Therefore, it is paramount to follow the CDC's steps for healthy swimming:





Splashing around in a public pool can be great fun, but the water can also spread germs and inflict swimmers with recreational water illness (RWI).


KEEP THE PEE, POOP, SWEAT, AND DIRT OUT OF THE WATER!

- Don't urinate or defecate in the water.
- Stay out of the water if you have had diarrhea within 24 hours.
- Shower before getting into the pool to rinse away dirt (minimum one minute).
- Stay out of the water if you have an open wound that is not covered by a secure waterproof bandage.
- Don't swallow the water.

EVERY HOUR—EVERYONE OUT!

- Take children on bathroom breaks.
- Check diapers and change them in the bathroom or diaper-changing area—not poolside—to keep germs away from the pool.
- Reapply sunscreen.

It is important to note that healthy public pools, spas, hot tubs, water parks, and splash and spray parks should not have a strong chemical smell. If they do, something may be amiss.

Pesticide-related complaints about public pools should be directed to the **California Department of Pesticide Regulation** (DPR) and the respective county agricultural commissioner. If you think you may have a recreational water illness, contact a health care provider licensed through the California Department of Consumer Affairs. 



HOME

IT'S TIME TO PEST-PROOF!

SPRING CLEANING IS A GOOD TIME TO PREVENT POTENTIAL HEALTH HAZARDS

Lana K. Wilson-Combs

Consumer Connection staff

After a cold, dreary, dark, and damp winter, most people are eager for the arrival of spring. Many insects are, too.

As the weather gets warmer, pests begin to come out of winter hiding and multiply. However, the last place you want to see ants, cockroaches, spiders, earwigs, bedbugs, termites, or other insects is in your home.

Now is a great time for homeowners, perhaps in the midst of spring cleaning, to add some simple, preventative pest-proofing measures to that “to-do” list. Or if the job seems too daunting, seek out licensed and skilled professionals in the pest control industry.

Pests carry a wide range of diseases, from Lyme disease to Zika. They can also carry bacteria that can contaminate food, equipment, and other stored products. Rodents can harbor and spread more than 200 human pathogens. Each year in the U.S., termites cause \$5 billion in property damage (to homes and businesses). Mosquitos have become one of the deadliest pests worldwide as they cause roughly 1 million deaths per year.




Let's face it: Insects are a part of nature, but those pesky pests don't have to be part of your home and ruin your spring and summer fun—or health.

Let's face it: Insects are a part of nature, but those pesky pests don't have to be part of your home and ruin your spring and summer fun—or health.

Here are some steps you can take to help ward off those creepy-crawlies:

- Remove dead leaves, twigs, and debris that may have built up in your yard over the winter. These are perfect homes for bugs and insects!
- Trim trees or bushes near your home; make sure to cut back any branches that touch your house, as they can serve as a walkway for bugs to enter.
- Clean your gutters.
- Fill in any cracks or gaps in windows, doorways, and the foundation (if it's accessible).
- Clean your kitchen thoroughly to remove any tempting food crumbs.
- Clean out cluttered storage areas where pests can hide.
- Repair any leaky pipes or fixtures; many bugs are looking for a water source.

Remember, it's much easier to prevent a pest control problem than to stop one. However, if you discover your home has an infestation, call a licensed pest control professional.

To verify the status and license of a pest control business with the Structural Pest Control Board, log on to <http://search.dca.ca.gov>. 

COMMERCIAL DESIGN COMES HOME

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS CAN TURN YOUR BACKYARD INTO AN OUTDOOR UTOPIA

Cheri Gyuro

Consumer Connection staff

Having drinks with friends on the rooftop of a high-rise hotel or dining in a pop-out along a busy downtown street are some of the latest signs that landscape architecture has taken a comfortable and stunning turn in California. There's a way to bring that contemporary lifestyle into your own space to enjoy.

If you're thinking about making improvements to your landscaping, it's important to know what projects call for a licensed landscape architect, and how to find and select one.

First, ask yourself the following:

- Does your community require stamped or signed documents for changes made to your property?
- How complicated is your property?
- How much control do you want during the process?

If you own a property that has a lot of grade change, problems with neighboring properties, or drainage issues, contracting with a licensed landscape architect might be in order.

"Landscape architects serve their clients throughout the design and construction process. In a nutshell, they are a knowledgeable advocate for the owner," said Marq Truscott, who is the Landscape Architects Technical Committee chair.

When bringing a city or country feel into your private space, follow your community's lead when it comes to handling water. The state, as well as local ordinances, have guides on handling stormwater and utilizing drought-resistant plant materials. Homeowners can use that same model in their own private space.

"Minimizing turf grass, planting resilient waterwise plants, and disconnecting their downspouts from underground pipes can make a big difference and save water," Truscott said.

You can also take cues from commercial properties when designing your space. Here are some of the top landscape architecture trends of 2020 that can help incorporate what defines your community into your project.





If you're thinking about making improvements to your landscaping, it's important to know what projects call for a licensed landscape architect, and how to find and select one.



BRING THE INDOORS OUT

California has been blessed with weather that allows residents to enjoy indoor living in outdoor elements. You see it on the streets all over the state—people dining on patios adorned with cozy fireplaces and beautiful landscaping.

“A homeowner can simply measure their favorite indoor gathering places and replicate that outdoors. One affordable way to create an instant outdoor gathering space involves the use of crushed aggregate [or] rock,” Truscott said. You can alter the size of your space using the rock to make the area larger or smaller. Truscott recommends using angular rock because “it ‘knits’ together better than rounded rock and scatters less.”

Much like an outdoor street patio at a restaurant, you can create an indoor/outdoor feel by choosing an outside space adjacent to an indoor room. Connect the room to a kitchen, dining, or living room with large doors or movable walls. Cover the outdoor part of the space by either building a roof structure or extending a canopy made of fabric. Give it that true living room feel by setting up durable couches, coffee tables, and dim lamp lighting for an intimate feel.



DUAL-PURPOSE SEATING

Retaining walls can add dimension and character to a space. The multiuse concept creates definition while serving a meaningful purpose. You can separate areas in your yard with sculptural seating that serves as a barrier between the grass and a pool or different levels of space fit for anyone to plop down and relax. A licensed landscape architect has the proper credentials to help design these types of structures.



DRAMATIC LIGHTING AND UNIQUE COLORS

Lighting can make or break any space. To get it right, use shadows to highlight textures on walls or accent lighting for interesting pieces of art. Create a mood and set the tone for your outdoor getaway with ambient lighting that doesn't use bright bulbs. Illuminate pathways and utilize fixtures with task lighting that brings a dramatic effect to your outdoor space as it comes to life.



EDIBLES WITH A NOD TO NATURE

Many busy California streetscapes are lined with edible landscaping so pedestrians can pluck a ripe piece of fruit to enjoy while walking to work. You can have the same in your own yard. Edibles are a

hot trend that could bring value to a property. Try planting berry shrubs or citrus trees to enjoy while lounging in your backyard. Choose fruit-bearing plants that match your climate zone and mix in other native plants that are drought tolerant.



ECO-FRIENDLY MATERIALS

Did you get new gutters on your roof recently? Don't throw out the old ones just yet. Upcycling is very popular. Consider drilling them onto a fence at different levels and plant your favorite flowers or grow some hot peppers. Take a discarded wooden pallet and hang a pallet garden. Re-purpose broken concrete to create an urban patio or path. Got a '60s-style fireplace you want to remove? Make it the center of your outdoor living space to warm things up.



ROOFTOP DECKING/LANDSCAPING

As California embraces more infill development, the need for more outdoor space is prevalent. When there's no ground available, the sky's the limit! For a green roof or rooftop garden, make sure your space has the right climate to grow the plants you desire. Hire a licensed landscape architect who can verify if the roof is strong enough and take the proper steps to protect it. A rooftop garden requires multiple

layers, including waterproof liners, gravel, moisture blankets, wood chips, compost, topsoil, irrigation, and plants.

"[We] spend a lot of effort with furniture layout, structures, lighting and soil design. As you can imagine, weight and waterproofing are a primary consideration for this work," Truscott said.

If you have a roof terrace or want to build a new one, be sure to find out how much weight the space can bear before moving in heavy furniture or allowing foot traffic. "We regularly work with architects, structural engineers, mechanical engineers, and electrical engineers to accomplish this task," Truscott said. If you have a balcony, use fence panels or lattices for added privacy. Try to keep the furniture light and compact to give yourself plenty of space. Place pots with plants for accents. Strike up an environment of your own by putting up a big-screen TV or a firepit for an urban element, or a water feature for calming sound.

As far as the future of landscape architecture, look up. Truscott says as California densifies with infill projects, the need for outdoor space will become more important. Developers and property owners will soon build more above-ground outdoor environments on structures to accommodate those who don't have the luxury of owning a yard.

Before starting your project, you can verify a California landscape architect's license by visiting <http://search.dca.ca.gov>. 



REAL ID 2021

*The REAL ID enforcement date is now October 2021.
For more information, please visit: [REALID.DMV.CA.GOV](https://realid.dmv.ca.gov)*



PREPARING YOUR FEET FOR SUMMER? START NOW!

As winter fades away, warm days by the pool or at the beach don't just mean getting into swimsuit shape. Your feet have been locked up in closed-toe boots all winter, and before you slip into a summer sandal, you might need to perform a little maintenance.

Here are five tips to get your toes tip-top for flip-flops:

- **Start in the winter.** Cold weather can cause dry, cracked skin, giving bacteria a place to thrive. Moisturizing your feet on a regular basis will give you a good head start at getting your feet ready for summer, even when summer is still far away. Spread moisturizer on your feet and cover with a sock for proper absorption.
- **On the rocks.** Using a pumice stone can smooth callouses and dry heels. Soak your feet in warm water and, when your skin has softened, wet the pumice stone and rub it gently over the calloused area. Rinse and repeat until you're satisfied with the results, then dry and moisturize your feet. But don't push it—pain or bleeding could be signs of a serious medical condition, such as diabetes or gout. It's best to consult with a doctor of podiatric medicine (DPM), licensed by the Podiatric Medical Board of California (www.pmbc.ca.gov).
- **Tackle athlete's foot.** This fungus can thrive in the warm, moist environment inside a waterproof boot or shoe. To avoid it, wash your feet every day, and make sure to dry your feet well, particularly between your toes. Don't walk barefoot in locker rooms or common shower areas.
- **Oil your nails.** Use a nail oil to keep your cuticles from drying out. Always trim your toenails straight across and file down sharp corners. Cutting your toenails rounded may cause them to grow into the sides of your nailbed.
- **Turn to a pro.** Are your feet too far gone for a tune-up at home? It happens! A professional pedicure will help bring your toes back to life. It's important to make sure your nail technician has a valid license issued by the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology by visiting <http://search.dca.ca.gov>.

MATT WOODCHEKE



INCLINED SLEEPERS DANGEROUS FOR INFANTS, AGENCY WARNS

Consumers should stop using all infant inclined sleepers—those that have been recalled or not—due to the risk of possible suffocation, federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) regulators said in November.

The agency's unusually widespread warning applies to any sleeping device for babies with an angle of more than 10 degrees. It comes after the recall of 4.7 million Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play Sleepers, which were linked to dozens of infant deaths by Consumer Reports.

CPSC announced the official recall on January 29 of 165,000 inclined sleepers by four manufacturers. The agency associated fewer than 40 infant deaths with the products as of April 2019, but that figure nationally had surged to 73 by November.

CPSC is pushing for new federal regulations that would outlaw infant sleepers of more than 10 degrees, and urging parents to put babies on flat, firm surfaces to avoid oxygen deprivation.

The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) said it recommends sharing a room—but not the same sleep surface or bed—with an infant for the first six months to a year of age to reduce the risk of suffocation. A study AAP released in February showed fewer than half of mothers polled were consistently following or intended to follow those guidelines.

RYAN JONES





As winter fades away, warm days by the pool or at the beach don't just mean getting into swimsuit shape. Your feet have been locked up in closed-toe boots all winter, and before you slip into a summer sandal, you might need to perform a little maintenance.



LAST WRITES: NATIONAL PLAN YOUR EPITAPH DAY

If you're one of those people who always likes to have the last word, you'll probably appreciate National Plan Your Epitaph Day. Oh yeah, there really is such a thing.

National Plan Your Epitaph Day is celebrated annually on April 6. But even though that day has passed, the spirit of the event lives on throughout the year.

The quirky observance was established in 1995 by Arcata author Lance Hardie, who wrote the book *How to Write Your Own Epitaph—and Live Long Enough to Enjoy It*.

The day isn't meant to be a somber or morbid occasion but rather a reflective one. It's an opportunity for people to decide what final inscription they want on their tombstone and to let others know about them. It can be anything from a popular catch phrase or favorite song lyric, to a classic line from a movie or poem.

The key is to make the inscription thoughtful, fun, and unique, because those who seriously follow National Plan Your Epitaph Day believe that "a forgettable gravestone is a fate worse than death."

By the way, the Department of Consumer Affairs' Cemetery and Funeral Bureau encourages families and loved ones to share planning ideas for funeral arrangements early to ensure everyone is on the same page.

For additional information on funeral and cemetery services, log on to the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau's website at www.cfb.ca.gov and click on the Consumers tab.

LANA K. WILSON-COMBS



VETS FOR PETS IN HOMELESS SHELTERS

Homeless pets and their human companions are a package deal. California moved forward to address this issue with the help of a \$5 million grant allocated to the Department of Housing and Community Development in the 2019-2020 state budget for qualifying homeless shelters.

The money has been directed to cover the costs of on-site veterinarian staff and offers basic veterinary care, food, and shelter for pets whose human companions are homeless.

The funding is expected to make a positive impact on "both ends of the leash" by providing life-saving support and services to many homeless pet owners who previously had to avoid shelters with a no-pet policy.

MICHELLE CAVE



KEEP YOUR DRIVING SKILLS SHARP AS A TACK WITH THESE CLASSES

Some California drivers face challenges with visual, physical, and cognitive abilities, especially as they age. These impairments can be costly when getting behind the wheel, but it's not just age that can affect driving. If you've been getting into minor fender-benders or near accidents, consider attending a free, state-sponsored program to brush-up on your skills.

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) is aiming to reduce motor vehicle collision and pedestrian deaths by offering specialized training for senior drivers. The "Age Well, Drive Smart" program is a free two-hour course that helps older drivers stay on the road by sharpening their skills, teaching them a refresher course on rules of the road, and suggestions on how to adjust to physical and mental changes. There's also the "Start Smart" class for young drivers learning how to avoid distracted driving.

The CHP has worked jointly in the past with the American Occupational Therapy Association to promote older driver safety awareness and is continuing its efforts to help the elderly and disabled with mobility and transportation, even when driving is no longer an option.

All courses are open to the public. For more information on schedules, contact your local CHP office by visiting www.chp.ca.gov/find-an-office.

CHERI GYURO



REACH OUT

The Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) protects and serves California consumers while ensuring a competent and fair marketplace. DCA accomplishes this by administering more than 3.9 million licenses in 250 license types, including permits, certificates, and registrations through the licensing and regulatory entities under its jurisdiction.

DCA provides consumers with current license status information on the millions of professionals licensed or certified through its entities. To check professionals' licenses, visit <http://search.dca.ca.gov>. To report concerns about a licensed professional or to find out more about a profession, contact one of the many DCA entities listed below.

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