

Take guess work out of vinyl leak repair

IT'S NO BIG NEWS that vinyl liners are susceptible to punctures and leakage. But to say that the leaks can be found and repaired in only 15 minutes — now that's news.

The LeakTrac 2100 from Anderson Manufacturing Co. Inc., St. Paul, Minn., could prove to be a technological breakthrough in the art of finding leaks in vinyl liner pools.

PROS AND CONS

Usually, the task of finding and repairing a vinyl liner leak involves any mixture of things, including dye, wet suits, air tanks, divers or emptying the pool altogether. This process can take up to four hours or longer, with divers being paid anywhere from \$100 to \$300 per hour.

But several pool builders and servicemen have been using LeakTrac since the beginning of last season, and they have favorable reports.

Don Ross, president of Ross & Son Pools Inc., Punxsutawney, Pa., has been installing vinyl liner pools for over 10 years. He said LeakTrac has taken about three hours off the time it usually takes him to repair leaks.

"I used to have to call out divers and it would take them two or three hours," he said. "Now, I'm out of there in a half-hour. I love it. It's the best machine ever invented."

With LeakTrac, you don't enter the pool until it is time to repair the

leak. It works by placing a small electrical charge into the pool water. The LeakTrac 2100 probe, which attaches to the end of a telescoping pole, tracks the electrical current as it makes connections to ground through holes in the liner. Audible signals direct the operator first to the general area of the leak and then to the precise location.

Setting up the equipment takes about five minutes, Ross said.

"Anderson has been great with product support," said John Stinemire, owner, Excalibur Pools & Spas, Glen Burnie, Md. "Just like any new product, there were some kinks that needed to be worked out, but they have found ways to solve the problems."

Stinemire explained that early on the probe would pick up signals from other grounded items in the pool like lights, stairs and the main drain. But Anderson developed plates and covers that have improved the product's efficiency.

"The only problem I have now is if the hole is in the corner of the steps, then I can't find it," Stinemire said. "But the challenges of the product are far outweighed by the benefits. There is no other system that can find leaks as precisely."

LeakTrac can be just as helpful not finding leaks as when it does. For Stinemire, it has taken the uncertain-

ty out of the repair of vinyl liners. Before, he would have to dive the pool and look for the leaks, never quite sure if he had missed one. Now, he has the confidence to stand on the results of LeakTrac.

That confidence won him a customer this winter. A local competitor had told a customer she needed to replace her liner entirely, but Stinemire proposed that she let him check the liner for holes before replacing it. Using the LeakTrac he found nothing. He was confident that the liner was leak-free.

He turned out to be right. The problem was found somewhere else. The pool owner already has assured him that when it does come time for the liner to be changed, Excalibur Pools will get the job.

"I might have lost a contract to replace a liner, but I gained a customer and that's what's important," Stinemire said.

Paul Domey, service manager for Heritage Pools, Sutton, Mass., also has used the device. "It takes some experience to learn how to operate it, and after that it's a wonderful tool. But it's not the cure-all, end-all," he said.

In his 30 years of experience, Domey has found that many pool leaks don't have anything to do with the liner but are due to faulty equipment and pipes. He makes sure to ask his customers a number of questions to diagnose the problem before he brings the LeakTrac out to the site.

Domey is averaging 20 minutes a



The LeakTrac 2100 from Anderson Manufacturing Co. Inc., St. Paul, Minn., locates leaks in vinyl liner pools.

repair with LeakTrac and also has used the device in winter months, breaking through ice to find leaks that otherwise would be impossible to locate.

LeakTrac also has made leak detection a little easier on consumers' pockets. "I can avoid the cost of divers and all that time spent in the water," Domey said. "It has saved me and [pool owners] money."

For more information, call Anderson Manufacturing at (612) 484-1316.

— Gordon Forsyth