
Pond safety

Ponds, like any body of water, attract people so that there is always a chance of injury or drowning. You may be planning to build a pond for watering livestock, irrigation, or any of the other purposes discussed in this handbook. However, your family and friends may picnic beside the pond or use it for fishing, swimming, boating, or ice skating, and you can never tell what a small child passing by may do.

Your pond can become a source of pleasure as well as profit, but only if it is safe. You can take some of the following steps to prevent injuries or drownings and to protect yourself financially.

Before construction

Almost all states have laws on impounding water and on the design, construction, and operation and maintenance of ponds. In many states small farm ponds are exempt from any such laws. You should become familiar with those that apply in your state and be sure that you and your engineer comply with them.

Find out what your community or state laws are regarding your liability in case of injury or death resulting from use of your pond, whether you authorize such use or not. This is particularly important if you intend to open your pond to the public and charge a fee for its use. You may find that you need to protect yourself with insurance.

You should decide how the water is going to be used so that you can plan the needed safety measures before construction starts. For example, if the water is to be used for swimming, guards over conduits are required. You may wish to provide for beaches and diving facilities; the latter require a minimum depth of about 10 feet of water.

During construction

Your contractor should take other safety measures during pond construction. Remove all undesirable trees, stumps, and brush and all rubbish, wire, junk machinery, and fences that might be hazardous to boating and swimming. Eliminate sudden dropoffs and deep holes.

After completion

Mark safe swimming areas and place warning signs at all danger points. Place lifesaving devices, such as ring buoys, ropes, planks, or long poles, at swimming areas to facilitate rescue operations should the need arise. Place long planks or ladders at ice skating areas for the same reason.