



Pool Compliance Guide

What Central Florida Homeowners
Need to Know Before Renovating

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If your pool was built before 2008, a renovation isn't just about looks — it's about safety and the law. Florida building code requires that certain systems be brought up to current standards any time permitted work is done. This guide explains what that means in plain language, so you know what to expect before the first shovel hits the ground.

1 Main Drains & Plumbing

The Short Version: Federal law and Florida building code require either a special unblockable drain OR two main drains spaced about three feet apart. Most pools built before the mid-2000s have only one drain — and those are not compliant. You can't simply add a second drain to the old pipes. The plumbing has to be redesigned from scratch.

Standard	What It Means
Old Standard	One main drain — single suction point at the deepest part of the pool floor.
Current Code	Two main drains ~3 ft apart OR an approved anti-entrapment unblockable drain cover.
Why It Matters	A single drain can trap a swimmer. Two drains split the suction so neither one creates a dangerous pull.
The Law	Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act (federal, 2008) plus current Florida building code.

Why can't you just add a second drain?

Homeowners often ask: "Can't you just drill in a second drain?" The short answer is no. Here's why:

- Old pipes are too small. Pipe sizes in older pools were designed for a single drain. Two drains need balanced water flow that old pipes can't handle.
- Speed limits exist. Code limits how fast water can move through suction pipes. Old pipes often push water too fast, which creates dangerous suction.
- The layout is wrong. A proper dual-drain system needs symmetrical pipes so each drain pulls equally. That can't be retrofitted — it has to be rebuilt.

- Balance is critical. If one drain pulls harder than the other, the safety problem isn't fixed. Equal flow requires a fresh design.

Think of it like a one-lane road. You can't just paint a second lane on a road that wasn't built for two lanes — you have to rebuild the road underneath. Pool plumbing works the same way.

2 Electrical Bonding

The Short Version: Bonding is an electrical safety system that ties every metal surface around your pool to the same voltage level. It prevents electric shock in the water. Older pools often lack a proper bonding system — or the wiring has corroded. Fixing it requires getting under the deck, which is why bonding and deck work always go together.

Term	What It Does	Who It Protects
Grounding	Connects the system to the earth to redirect a fault current.	Equipment
Bonding	Connects all metal surfaces so they share the same electrical level.	People

What must be bonded?

- The pool shell and walls
- The water itself (via a bonding connection at the main drain)
- All metal equipment — pump, filter, heater
- All deck metal — handrails, ladders, anchor points
- Water feature hardware
- The perimeter bonding grid buried in the deck base within 3 feet of the pool wall

Why does the deck have to come up?

The perimeter bonding grid — the most important piece — must be buried in the base material under the deck, within 3 feet of the pool wall. There is no way to install it correctly without opening the deck. This is why bonding upgrades and deck work always happen together.

Common problems in older pools:

- Pools built before 2000 often used a simple ring bond or had no grid at all.
- Bonding wires corrode over time — especially in Central Florida's heat and humidity.
- Older electrical systems often lack GFCI (ground fault) protection on pool circuits.
- Any permitted electrical work during a renovation triggers a full bonding inspection.

3 Deck Removal & Replacement

The Short Version: This is the biggest surprise for most homeowners. When the plumbing and bonding have to be upgraded, the deck has to come up — and it's rarely just a small section. Plan for 50–100%

of the deck being removed and replaced.

Why can't you just patch it?

- Plumbing runs all the way around the pool. A small cutout rarely gives enough room to work.
- The bonding grid must run continuously under the deck. Partial access doesn't work.
- Concrete patches never match the existing deck — color, texture, and cracks at the cut line are all visible.

What removal looks like by deck type:

Deck Type	What Happens
Paver Deck	Pavers can sometimes be removed, saved, and re-set — but this depends on their condition and whether the base needs rebuilding. Budget for replacement even when re-use is the goal.
Concrete Deck	Concrete is cut and removed. It cannot be patched seamlessly — color-matching is imperfect and cracks tend to appear along cut lines. Full replacement of affected sections is standard.
Acrylic Deck	Cut, remove, and repour affected sections. The acrylic coating is then reapplied over the new concrete.

What drives deck costs?

- Hand demolition in tight spaces (small yards, narrow gates, landscaping in the way).
- Debris disposal — concrete and pavers add up fast.
- Substrate repair — if the base material was disturbed or failed, it must be rebuilt first.
- Re-installation — whether you're re-setting salvaged pavers or pouring fresh concrete.

4 Pool Shell & Structural Integrity

The Short Version: Before any cosmetic work — new plaster, tile, or interior finish — the pool shell itself has to be checked. Structural problems must be fixed first. They don't disqualify a renovation, but they do change the scope and cost.

What we look for:

- Structural cracks— deep cracks that go through the shell, not just surface crazing in the plaster.
- Delamination— interior finish separating from the shell underneath.
- Prior repairs— how well past repair work was done.
- Pop history— whether the pool has ever "floated" or lifted out of the ground due to groundwater pressure (common in Florida).
- Settlement or movement— signs that the shell has shifted.

Structural issues found during an inspection don't mean your pool can't be renovated — they just have to be addressed before interior finish work begins. They may change the order of work and add to the project scope.

5 Green Lights & Red Flags

Not sure where your pool stands? Use this quick checklist. The more green lights you have, the more likely your renovation is mostly cosmetic. The more red flags — the more likely code-upgrade work is required.

GREEN LIGHTS	RED FLAGS
Pool built in 2008 or later	Pool built before 2008
Two visible main drains about 3 feet apart	Only one main drain visible at the deepest point
Drain covers look current and are in good condition	Drain covers are cracked, missing, or over 10 years old
Visible copper bonding wire at the equipment pad	No bonding wire visible at the equipment pad
GFCI protection on all pool-area electrical outlets and circuits	Old single-speed pump (15+ years old)
A permitted renovation completed in the last 10 years	No record of any permitted renovation work
Variable-speed pump already installed	Deck is cracked, settling, or failing
Deck is solid — no structural cracks or settling	Structural cracks, delamination, or pop history in the shell
Pool shell is sound — no pop history	Missing GFCI protection on pool-area circuits

Questions? Premier Pools of Central Florida is happy to walk you through what your specific pool needs. Every pool is different — an on-site assessment is the only way to know for sure what's required.

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