


Trump Blames Vandals for Reflecting Pool Problems. Internal Records Tell Another Story.

The documents do not indicate that the peeling blue coating and algae blooms were caused intentionally.

 Listen · 8:42 min



By Maxine Joselow and David A. Fahrenthold

Maxine Joselow, a climate reporter who covers the Interior Department, and David A. Fahrenthold, an investigative reporter, have been following the Trump administration's overhaul of Washington, D.C., sites.

June 23, 2026

See more of our coverage in your search results.

[Add The New York Times on Google ↗](#)

President Trump says the peeling blue coating and algae blooms that mar his \$16.4 million renovation of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool are the fault of vandals working with “knives” in the “dark of night.”

But government documents obtained by The New York Times show that while National Park Service workers found two cuts in sections of foam between the pool's expansion joints, those were not directly related to the “American flag blue” coating that is now peeling, or to the algae that has turned the pool a bright shade of green.

Even as the documents show workers were attempting to address deteriorating conditions, Trump administration officials were insisting publicly that the pool was pristine.

The pool had been drained, resealed and then refilled by June 5. Four days later, Park Service workers discovered holes, cracks and peeling caulking in parts of the pool, along with cuts in sections of the foam, according to the documents.

The cause of the cuts was unclear. While a June 9 report by the U.S. Park Police described the cuts as “razor blade slashes” made along a 20-foot-long stretch of the foam, the administration has yet to present evidence supporting that assertion. The documents reviewed by The Times described them as two 171-foot blade cuts but did not address how they were made.

By June 16, workers had noticed that chunks of blue sealant that covered the pool’s bottom were peeling and floating to the surface, the documents show. That sealant was separate from the foam in the pool’s expansion joints, which allow its concrete slabs to expand and contract.

The workers had also discovered that some devices installed to kill algae were not working as intended, according to the documents. And enormous algae blooms had turned portions of the pool bright green instead of dark blue.

But on June 15, Mr. Trump was still declaring the renovation a success, telling reporters that “I’m very good at building things and constructing things.”

The Reflecting Pool is a centerpiece of Mr. Trump’s attempts to remake the capital in honor of the nation’s 250th birthday. The pool has been plagued by leaks and algae for decades; Mr. Trump boasted that he had repaired it quickly and affordably, but both problems have returned in force.

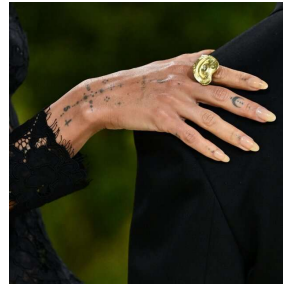
Work to fix the problems may not be finished until after July 4 — a setback for the president, who wanted the renovation to be completed before then.

Trending in the Times



\$22,000 Per Hour: Assistants Use a Legislative Loophole to Outearn Surgeons

Meg Ryan Lists the Hamptons Home She Bought Two Years Ago



When Did Bare Nails Become a Status Symbol?



Should I Keep My Mother's Wedding Gown?

On Saturday, Mr. Trump acknowledged the pool would have to be at least partially drained for more work. On Tuesday, the president said on social media that six people had been arrested, and seven others had been cited, for slashing the pool's sealant with a "sharp knife or razors."

"It was purposefully and criminally done, and somebody had to work very hard, probably in the dark of night," he wrote.

Mr. Trump also told reporters on Monday, without offering evidence, that vandals had poured fertilizer into the pool to feed the algae.

Neither the Interior Department nor the White House would provide charging documents, citations or the names of anyone arrested. They did share the Park Police incident report, which said any suspect or suspects were unknown. The report also did not mention any damage to the pool's blue sealant, nor did it describe any vandals dumping fertilizer.

Katie Martin, a spokeswoman for the Interior Department, did not answer specific questions about the government documents but said in an email on Tuesday that the pool was "clear" and "reflecting beautifully."

“While President Trump was restoring a crown jewel of our nation’s capital, which is supported by Americans across the country, vandals were attempting to destroy, impede and delay the ongoing work,” she said.

On Tuesday, portions of the pool appeared dark blue and reflected the Washington Monument and the overcast sky. But an enormous clump of green algae remained visible in the center.

A few curiosity seekers braved the rain to stroll around the site, which has become a sightseeing draw. They were outnumbered by throngs of law enforcement officers and other personnel, including from the National Guard, Park Police and U.S. Marshals Service. The National Guard troops were stationed around the pool’s perimeter, with some huddling under trees to stay dry.

The administration is setting up fencing around the site before the July 4 fireworks display for safety reasons, Ms. Martin said. But it’s going up earlier than originally planned because of what she called an “increase in vandalism by leftist activists.”

The Trump administration awarded two no-bid contracts for the Reflecting Pool renovations, bypassing the legally required process of seeking competitive bids because of what it called an urgent need to complete the project for events around the nation’s 250th birthday.

The first \$14.7 million contract went to a Virginia-based company called Atlantic Industrial Coatings to spread the sealant in the “American flag blue” shade across the pool’s concrete slabs. The second \$1.7 million contract went to Ohio-based Greenwater Services to install devices called nanobubblers, which infuse the water with ozone to kill algae and bacteria.

On June 15, workers discovered that one or two of the four temporary nanobubblers weren’t working at any given time because of problems with generators, and that the water was turning green. By the next day, officials had noticed blue coating peeling, as well.

Representatives for Atlantic Industrial Coatings and Greenwater Services, also known as Green Water Solutions, did not respond to requests for comment.

Though Mr. Trump claimed vandals dumped fertilizer in the pool, his administration refilled it with D.C. municipal water, which is treated with phosphate to keep lead from leaching out of old pipes. But phosphate also provides nutrients for algae, as do droppings from ducks swimming in the pool.

In a post on its website on Sunday, Atlantic Industrial Coatings said that “a very small part of the massive 7-acre project” would require repairs. The company added that it would do the work under warranty.

Anthony Flett, the chief executive of U.S. Coating Specialists, a Florida-based company that specializes in waterproofing coatings, reviewed the documents at the request of The Times. He wouldn’t dismiss vandalism, but said it appeared that the sealant may be peeling off because not enough material was applied.

“I don’t want to totally blame the vandalism,” he said. “If they put more material down, maybe none of this would be an issue.”

“There’s people in the pool industry whose whole life is polyurea, and they should have been called in,” Mr. Flett said. “They should have been there to watch over the project to make sure that these failures weren’t prevalent. I think it was just done too hastily.”

The coating was made by a California-based company called Rhino Linings. Pierre Gagnon, the president and chief executive of Rhino Linings, said in an email that the peeling appeared to be “limited to isolated areas” of the pool.

Algae has bloomed frequently in the pool for decades. Its shallow, stagnant water becomes a petri dish for the aquatic organisms in the summer sun.

Experts said the algae didn’t threaten public health because the water is not intended for swimming or drinking. But they cautioned that if left unchecked, the blooms could give rise to cyanobacteria, which could be highly toxic to any ducks, dogs or other animals that drink the water.

“Just because it’s green algae this week doesn’t mean that it isn’t going to be cyanobacteria tomorrow,” said Ashley Bair, a senior research developer at Usalco, a company that makes coagulants and other water-treatment chemicals.

Ms. Bair, who spoke to The Times from a gathering of water-treatment experts in Washington, added that the Reflecting Pool was the talk of the conference.

Maxine Joselow covers climate change and the environment for The Times from Washington.

David A. Fahrenthold is a Times investigative reporter writing about nonprofit organizations. He has been a reporter for two decades.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Records Counter Trump Claim Of Vandals at Reflecting Pool