



[Greg Lee](#), KESQ News Channel 3 & CBS Local 2 Reporter, glee@kesq.com
POSTED: 11:40 PM PST Feb 03, 2014 UPDATED: 12:02 AM PST Feb 04, 2014

Budget issues keeping DHS swim team out of the water

The Desert Hot Springs high school swim team could be forced to cancel its season because it can't get into a pool to practice. Budget cuts and a hang-up in fee negotiations is keeping them out of the John Furbee Aquatics Center at the city's health and wellness center where the team had planned on practicing. All this, stemming from a city that continues to get out of a fiscal emergency.

On Monday, the team staged its version of a protest by practicing in the parking lot of the wellness center. Student-athletes went through conditioning exercises on what should've been their first day in the pool. The team's been stuck on land for the last month, just a few weeks before the season begins on March 11. The season itself is in jeopardy. "Basically if we cannot secure a pool, we will not be having a swim team," said head coach Debbie Hadden.

The team had planned to use the state-of-the-art John Furbee aquatic center that opened up in January 2012, closing the Wardman park pool the team usually used. But, the city closed the pool to cut costs during its fiscal emergency. The city says the \$16,000 a month to operate the facility didn't make sense when even the police department took cuts. "Probably our top priority is public safety for our community," said Bob Adams, the city's interim city manager. "The kids are a very high priority also, but we look at that as being part of the school district's responsibility."

The team says Palm Springs Unified has offered to bus the team to Palm Desert or Palm Springs for practice. However, the practice times available in Palm Springs are early in the morning or late at night. The problem with bussing to Palm Desert is the travel time, which would hurt the students. "If we can't get a pool to swim in and we have to commute, then I'm not going to be able to that," said Kierra Kuhlmen, a senior on the team. "It takes too much time out of my day and I have school to worry about."

While the district and the city work to get the team back in the pool, the students can't help but feel like they're fighting an uphill battle in their own hometown. "If our community can't have a swim team, then that's just taking one less opportunity for kids to branch out and I think it's really unfair," said Kuhlmen. Unfair, but perhaps the financial reality for a city just trying to keep its head above water. "We would love to open that facility, but we need a way to pay for it," said Adams.