



# Aquarium Professionals Group

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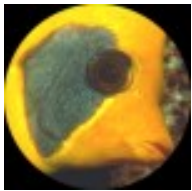
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## Industry Issues

### Aquarium Stores vs. Aquarium Maintenance Companies

## Do aquarium maintenance businesses represent unfair competition for aquarium stores?



**For those aquarium retailers that are reading this,** we would first like to point out a few facts about The Aquarium Professionals Group. We are not an aquarium retail store. Although we are an aquarium maintenance company, and we sometimes compete with aquarium stores, it is impossible to compare us to the average aquarium maintenance company as aquarium maintenance is not the primary focus of our business.

**We sell aquariums, specializing in very large custom aquaria,** to which many aquarium stores do not have the time or resources to devote. We do not operate out of a home. We have offices, a production shop, a fish room, warehouses, and many vehicles. We employ a larger staff (currently twelve employees) than most aquarium stores. We are fully licensed and insured, maintain large aquarium holding systems, and actually have a higher operational overhead than most small aquarium stores. Although we are unique, we can sympathize with aquarium retailers and legitimate aquarium maintenance businesses alike over the problems both face in trying to survive in today's competitive world.

**An aquarium retail store owner incurs a huge expense** to start and operate their store. They already have plenty of low-overhead competition. Mail-order pet suppliers, internet pet stores, and that ever-present annoyance to all pet stores and a bane to the industry - Supermarket Pet Stores, are all competing with the street retailer for aquarium business. The last thing an aquarium store needs is more competition in their own backyard from a one-person maintenance company that takes away aquarium sales and service business without having the same high overhead burden.

### Aquarium Maintenance Companies - The Dark Side:

**We are aware of why the aquarium industry** at large has a certain amount of disdain and bad feelings towards aquarium maintenance companies. Many small maintenance companies damage the reputation of aquarium-keeping as a whole, especially for the marine aquarium hobby. Too many inexperienced aquarists, attracted by what sounds like easy money, open small maintenance companies assuming their basic aquarium knowledge will allow them to succeed. The majority of them fail miserably, but usually only after doing some type of damage to the reputation of the industry. This happens due to acts of ignorance and negligence which ultimately kill people's fish or ruin aquariums.

**The companies that make these mistakes** quickly go out of business, but not before the damage is done. Not only are beautiful animals destroyed in the process, but the reputation of aquarium-keeping goes down a notch, making life difficult for good aquarium businesses. Angry aquarium owners take down their tanks and spread word of their bad experience with aquaria. These people, and the people to whom they tell their tales of woe, all represent potential lost sales to the aquarium industry and help to perpetuate myths like "saltwater aquariums are hard to keep," and "keeping aquariums is just another way to uselessly kill animals."

**We also know that some of these businesses** try to obtain customers by means that are less than ethical or worse. Some maintenance company owners visit local aquarium stores and hang out pretending to be customers. They then try to solicit clients who are shopping in the store, and often get away with it, effectively stealing customers from the competition. Others may hang out in front of successful aquarium stores, handing out flyers advertising their services.

Even if store owners catch them in the act, their only recourse is a law suit. That's an expense no one needs, and you don't win when the people you're suing have no money. Some unscrupulous maintenance businesses will also sneak their customers into a store to look at aquarium models or fish, using the competing aquarium store as their "showroom."