CHRISTIAN BUILDING INSPECTORS INCORPORATED ®

Home Tips®

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Q & A

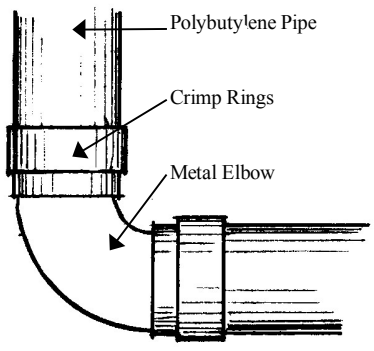
What Is The Problem With Polybutylene Water Pipes?

We have gray plastic water pipes in our house and we have been told that they may be defective. How can you tell and what can we do about it?

The gray flexible plastic piping you are referring to is called Polybutylene commonly referred to as PB piping which was produced originally by Shell Oil Company. In the 1980's Shell promoted PB piping as a cheap, easily installed successor to copper.

According to Michael Casey, with Michael Casey and Associates, El Cajon, CA., a great deal of controversy has surrounded PB piping in recent years because of leaks in both interior and exterior supply piping. The industry at first blamed them all on faulty installation. It later acknowledged that the plastic fittings were a problem. The original plastic fittings used barbed inserts made of polyacetal. The acetal fittings were used from approximately 1980 through 1986. The plastic fittings are stressed and crack by pressure used to secure the crimp rings, leaving the material susceptible to attack by chlorine and other chemicals in the water supply.

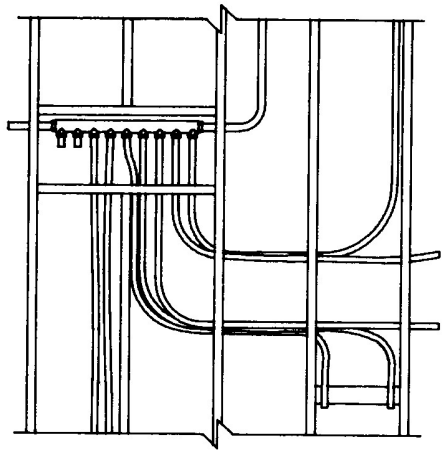
Around 1985 copper and brass fittings replaced the plastics.



TYPICAL CONNECTION

The fittings were attached to the pipe with crimp rings. The crimp rings were originally made of aluminum and then changed to copper. The crimping tool used to affix the rings at the fittings was a combination tool capable of crimping both 1/2" and 3/4" piping. Due to the difficulty of keeping this tool calibrated, these fittings sometimes leaked also. The combination tool was discontinued in 1985. Installers were advised to use separate tools for various sizes which did away with the calibration problem.

Another solution to the fitting problem has been solved by using what is referred to as a "Manifold System". This system utilizes a manifold, located at the main water supply,



MANIFOLD SYSTEM

where all of the pipe connections are made out in the open so you will be able to inspect all of the connections. The pipes run all the way to the fixtures without any fittings being concealed. This eliminates the problems associated with leaking fittings that are hidden or concealed. The manifolds are gaining in popularity especially in the Atlanta area.

The problems with the pipe itself is not consistent or very clear. Some people think the pipe cannot stand up to normal levels of chlorine, hot water, and physical stress - a charge which the industry denies. We find very few problems with the actual pipe around Atlanta. The biggest piping problem seems to be with the main piping from the street called "Big Blue" for its typically blue color. Although rare, sometimes this pipe fails underground and has to be replaced.

Just because you have polybutylene piping in your home does not mean you will experience any problems. The industry has improved on the products and most homeowners find that they do not experience problems. If you do have problems, contact your plumber and they will assist you in evaluating your system or refer you to someone who can.

Information on proper installation procedures and common problems are outlined in the booklet "PB Handbook One" which can be obtained from the Plastic Pipe and Fitting Association, 800 Roosevelt Road, Building C, Suite 20, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, 60137, (708) 858-6540.

In addition, the Plumbing Claims Group (PCG) is a hotline set up by the manufacturers of polybutylene to provide information and warranty service. PCG can be contacted at 500 North Central Expressway, Suite 125, Plano, Texas 75094-0744 or call (800) 356-3496. It is not uncommon for homeowners who have two or more major leaks in their

polybutylene system to receive a re-pipe for a greatly reduced cost or for free.
(Excerpts taken from "The ASHI Reporter, July/August 1995.)

Are Paint And Primer About The Same?

I've been told that since primer is so thin, you get better results with two coats of paint than with a prime coat and a paint coat. Is this true?

No! Primers bond better to bare wood because they have more binders and less pigment. Many homes peel because a primer was not used. The most important thing to do in painting is to be sure the paint will bond properly to the surface you are about to paint.

First scrape off the loose paint with a putty knife or wire brush. Next clean the surface with a stiff brush or pressure washer using a cleaner such as TSP (tri sodium phosphate). This will clean the dirt that could prevent bonding. Use a primer that is compatible with the paint. You can tint the primer the same color as the paint for better coverage. Unless you enjoy painting, I recommend using a top quality house paint that will last 15 to 20 years.

Do You Seal Storm Windows?

We just installed new storm windows on our house and my neighbor said you must seal them in order to insulate better. Is this true?

No! You are not trying to create insulated glass windows. You are just trying to protect the existing windows from severe weather and wind. Sealing the storm window can trap moisture between the interior window and the storm window. The moisture will cause condensation and will eventually cause the wood on the interior window to decay. The window sill normally will decay first. Be sure the moisture can escape through weep holes at the bottom of the storm window.

Most aluminum and vinyl storm windows come with weep hole already manufactured on the bottom of the window trim. The openings around the trim will allow air to circulate and reduce the amount of moisture that gets in between the two.

If you have a question, change of address, comment, home tip or would like to send *Home Tips* to your clients, send your letter to *Home Tips*, Christian Building Inspectors, Inc., 1003 Star Court, Norcross, Georgia 30093. We reserve the right to edit for length.

Quote Of The Month

"THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE IMPOSSIBLE AND THE POSSIBLE LIES IN A PERSON'S DETERMINATION"

- TOMMY LASORDA

A Tip Of The Hat To:

William Phillips
Jon Browne & Associates
Stone Mountain, Georgia

Thank You