

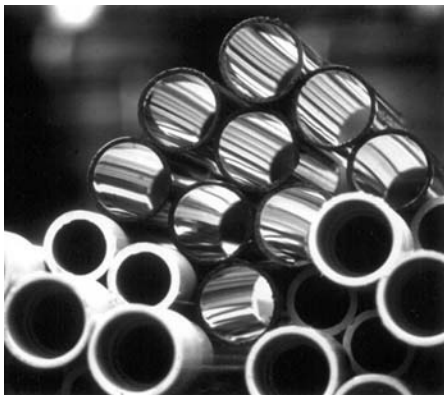
The real green piping system by David A. Chasis

What piping material can be locally produced, naturally abundant and renewable? Wood pipe! That's right; pipe made directly from wood — preferably bamboo since it can reproduce itself in a 10-year cycle — offers all the listed benefits.

Wood piping was introduced in North America in geographical areas where lumber was readily available and cheap such as the Northwestern USA, Canada, California, upper New York and the New England States. This "wunderkind" piping material was installed in the late 1800s and early 1900s mainly as an alternative for metal piping. Can you possibly imagine a better or "greener" piping material? Shouldn't we resurrect its piping life?

We should, if the market would be willing to accept a piping system that leaks, has weakly fabricated or no wood-made fittings, is difficult to join, is attacked by insects and rodents, is not interchangeable with other piping systems, has an irregular internal bore, is flammable, and has extremely high installation costs. These and other considerations were the reasons the market chose not to use this "green" piping system decades ago. The same rationale still exists.

The reasons any product (pipe or any other item) should be selected for use is a gestalt approach. Certainly, impact on the



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environment should be a consideration, but what about other features such as durability, ease of use, safety and cost effectiveness? Incorporating all these benefits have made plastic piping systems the fastest growing piping system in the world for the last four decades; in the engineering community, many engineers opine that plastic is the preferred piping material in many applications.

The plastic piping industry produces products that have proven themselves year after year. It is the most scrutinized piping product ever made, and yet the plastics industry has to constantly maintain a defensive posture based on attacks from environmental and labor groups who have their own agenda. The shame of the matter is the attacks are for the most part without scientific proof or merit. If these extremists were truly interested in the needs of community, environment and society, they would embrace products which offer optimum benefits to the public.

It's interesting to note that the plastic piping industry has worked closely with the governmental watchdog agencies (EPA, FDA, OSHA) for years, as well as dozens of local, national and international code and standard agencies. When any of these agencies have asked for input, tests, studies or plant visits, the industry has been eager to assist. Not only that, but companies producing plastic piping products for potable water applications pay to empower an impartial third party, such as the National Sanitary Foundation International, to oversee and ensure all ASTM and other standards are being achieved.

In addition, these certifiers have the authority to close down manufacturing production if these rigid standards are not being met. And yet certain groups imagine there is a conspiracy afoot in which governmental and third-party agencies are not astute enough to determine that plastic piping causes harm to the environment. Similar groups using the same unfounded tactics have tried for 20 years or more to also attack plastic piping in Europe with little measurable success.

Presently, the plastic piping industry is having their products evaluated by

third-parties to determine the overall *scientific* impact of plastic pipe versus other piping materials to the environment and economy using an analytical tool called Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). This detailed analysis studies products from phases of inception to the end-of-product life. LCA will be used by green building-rating systems and standards as a way to fairly compare the true impacts of products without biased rhetoric. Results in Europe and preliminary results in North America are showing that plastics are the equal or better than other piping material, contrary to extremist's press-released myths.



Wood pipe installed decades ago in the New England area of the United States.

Next time you are selecting which product is most "green," consider using common sense and proven science to assist your decision-making process ... it might prevent you from accepting "wooden nickels." ■

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