

By: Richard Doyle

PLASTIC PIPE IS KEY TO WATER INFRASTRUCTURE



As our next administration and Congress grapple with the challenge of improving our nation's deteriorating water infrastructure, they should keep one fact in mind. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe is the safest and most durable and affordable material available today to replace our aging underground systems and serve the interests of U.S. taxpayers.

PVC pipe costs less, and lasts longer, than iron pipe. The foremost experts on pipe durability have confirmed it. City officials in Pleasanton, California, have validated it, noting that ductile iron pipe is 70 percent more expensive than PVC pipe. PVC pipe failures are "extremely rare" — and Burton, Michigan, is saving over \$2 million by replacing dilapidated iron pipe with efficient, high-performance PVC. It is lead-free and has been certified by the National Sanitation Foundation International for safe water delivery (the same standards the Environmental Protection Agency adopted for its own drinking water advisory programs back in 1990).

Iron pipe, by contrast, is prone to corrosion, and the resulting bacteria buildup can affect the quality of drinking water. As iron pipe corrodes, its useful life is reduced and can lead to premature failures and costly leaks and repairs. The iron pipe industry now makes available ductile iron pipe, which corrodes even more quickly than traditional iron pipe, due to the material's thinner walls, leading to increased breakage and loss of water.

Cast iron pipes may have served our infrastructure needs in the past. But today, after reaping the benefits of an uncontested monopoly for nearly a century, the iron pipe industry finds itself in a fight for its survival, as PVC pipe has quickly become the go-to material to replace iron pipe in cities across the nation. In response,

the Ductile Iron Pipe Research Association (DIPRA) has launched a campaign to malign the PVC pipe industry.

Complicating DIPRA's message, though, are numerous news accounts of corroded iron water mains rupturing around the country, impacting first responders and disrupting people's lives. Meanwhile, the group's president, Jon Runge, continues to mislead the public by promoting a DIPRA-backed study that contains incorrect information.

DIPRA is also engaging in a behind-the-scenes effort to protect iron pipe's monopoly at the expense of U.S. taxpayers, spending countless resources to pressure states to block PVC pipe from being considered as a possible material option. If successful, iron pipe manufacturers would be an exclusive material provider, allowing them to control the market and charge city officials whatever they wish. And, as everyone knows, when competition shrinks, taxpayers lose — resulting in higher prices for everyone.

The ductile iron industry defends these monopolistic actions by telling the American people, effectively, "Don't worry, we know what's best for you" and then attacking PVC pipe. But industry officials are conspicuously tongue-tied when it comes to defending the corrosive nature of ductile iron pipe and remain silent about PVC pipe's economic advantages over ductile iron.

Policymakers should keep in mind that business monopolies never have the taxpayers' best interests at heart. When it comes to repairing our nation's infrastructure, the public deserves to have PVC pipe represented at the decision table.