For Immediate Release
September 2005

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Pipe walk convinces KC Public Works to do more than talk

Kansas City Public Works gives HDPE storm sewer pipe its approval

There's nothing like crawling through several hundred feet of an active storm sewer pipe to help make up your mind about approving it.

Jeff Martin, P.E., materials engineer for the KCMO Public Works Department, got a look at high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe literally from the inside out, and he was convinced.

Manufacturing members of the Plastics Pipe Institute (PPI) recently accompanied Martin on a field inspection of HDPE storm sewer pipe in various sizes up to 60-inch diameters. The KCMO Standards Committee then was presented with information and field observation opportunities by a PPI-member company to convince them of the benefits of allowing HDPE pipe in storm sewer applications.

Ultimately a majority of the members present agreed to allow its use, and Section 2602 of the Kansas City specification was amended to include corrugated HDPE pipe. It was a decision that PPI and the industry's manufacturing leaders had been anticipating for about 10 years.

"We liked what we saw inside that pipe," Martin said. "This approval is something I've been open to, and it had been in the works for a long time."

Dan Currence, P.E., a regional engineer at a PPI-member company, said some new faces at KCMO and the approval of HDPE pipe at the state level were key to the Kansas City's long-awaited acceptance.

"Several people retired who had been against re-writing the spec," Currence said. "With the newer faces came new attitudes and open minds to where the future of this industry is going."

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One of those new faces was Greg Rokos, P.E., assistant city engineer for KCMO. He came to Kansas City from the state level where HDPE pipe had recently been accepted as well. Kansas City followed the state's lead when it further wrote into the spec that all HDPE pipe used on a job must comply with the PPI third-party certification testing procedure.

"This program has held corrugated HDPE pipe to the highest standards," said Rich Gottwald, president of PPI. "No other products or materials in the storm water pipe industry are measured so strictly. We've raised the confidence level of engineers and contractors – like the ones in Kansas City and across the country – that the corrugated HDPE pipe they specify and install in their projects has been scrutinized for consistency in raw materials, manufacturing and design criteria for dimensional performance."

The PPI pipe certification program consists of random, unannounced inspections at manufacturers' facilities by a third party administrator to evaluate material, dimensional, and physical performance properties as specified in AASHTO M294/MP7 for 12-inch to 60-inch pipe. If the pipe complies with all requirements and the manufacturer's quality control program is satisfactory, PPI will list the certified pipe on its Web site and the manufacturer may mark the products with the program's Certified Products Seal.

"The main advantage for us to the certification of the pipe is getting a handle on the quality of the material we're putting the ground," Martin said. "It's impossible to go out and touch every piece of pipe that is installed on every project. But that third-party verification means that someone else has done that for us, and we're confident in the product."

Corrugated HDPE pipe is available with soil tight, silt tight, and watertight joining systems. These integral joints meet the stringent standards mandated by the EPA in new legislation, and comply with ASTM and AASHTO specifications. O-ring rubber or elastomeric gaskets, conforming to applicable ASTM standards, are used in both the silt tight and watertight joining systems.

"The fact that we had already been written into the state's spec carried a lot of weight for Greg," Currence said. "Showing him about three miles of a pipe project in West Plains on Missouri Highway 63 also proved a lot to him. He was instrumental in getting the KCMO approval."

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Also vital to the new spec was the city engineers' foresight that future federal regulations are in the works that may require all storm sewers to feature watertight joints. With the advancements in HDPE pipe technology, watertight joints are now common among PPI-member manufacturers' product listings.

Martin did a plant tour at a PPI-member company in advance of the spec being accepted in Kansas City. On the tour, he observed the manufacturing process and the way joints are tested.

"I got to see the actual manufacturing process as well as the in-house Quality Control lab they had," Martin said. " And observing the joint test on the pipe removed any doubt about the water tightness of the pipe joints."

As HDPE pipe is accepted in more municipalities across the country, engineers at PPI have observed that the price of competing materials almost always shows an immediate drop – whether or not HDPE pipe is specified in a project or not.

"Just the introduction of another material into the mix is going to have a positive effect on prices from the end user standpoint," said Michael Pluimer, PPI engineering manager.

About PPI
The Plastics Pipe Institute is the major trade association representing all segments of the plastics piping industry. Member companies share a common interest in broadening market opportunities that make effective use of plastics piping for water and gas distribution, sewer and wastewater, oil and gas production, industrial and mining uses, power and communications duct and irrigation. More information is available at www.plasticpipe.org.

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