



Home Inspection Services Newsletter

November, 2008

Educational Section: Polybutylene Water Piping

Polybutylene (PB) potable water pipe was installed extensively in Arizona between 1978 and 1995. Hailed as a breakthrough material, PB was cheaper than copper pipe and installation less expensive (usually done by semi-skilled techs). PB was a desired option for cost-sensitive home builders. It's estimated that PB pipe was installed in 1 of 5 site-built homes and a much higher percentage of factory built homes. Although extensively laboratory tested, as with all new products, the ultimate test is the "test of time"; a test that PB plumbing failed.

The failure mode of PB is **water leakage including burst joints**. Since much of residential PB piping is overhead (in attics) and in walls, a pipe failure generally creates thousands of dollars of water damage. **Several Class action lawsuits** were filed and settlement funds resulted (along with applicable eligibility guidelines). A determining factor for settlement \$ eligibility is demonstration of previous "qualified" leakage. If a homes' PB plumbing has never leaked, it will most likely not qualify for the settlement fund. Final filing dates are approaching. For information about **PB settlements**, please visit www.pbpipe.com (or similar sites).

Per AZ Standards of practice, home inspectors are **required** to report the presence of PB plumbing if viewed during the inspection process. Since installers often utilized copper stub outs (where pipes protrude from walls) identification often relies on attic or crawl space visibility. Unlike galvanized pipe which telegraphs failure (rust and blisters), there are no visible signs of impending failure of PB; 90% of which occur at pipe joints. If PB is present, we recommend that homeowners and home buyers seek the opinion of a plumbing contractor specializing in PB piping. Most will recommend replacement even if there is no history of failure. Home buyers should check the seller's disclosure for pipe type and review homeowners' insurance eligibility if PB piping is present.

Inspection Item for November: Termites

Pest professionals recommend that Arizona homes be inspected for termites annually. If evidence of termite activity is found during the inspection, damage is generally not an issue. Some pest companies perform these inspection **for little or no fee** “in hopes” of selling a termite treatment but you are not obligated to utilize that company to treat. **NOTE:** The service that sprays your home for insects (not termites) is usually not inspecting for termites.

Question of the Month: Why Can't I find the leak?

We frequently report leaks in under sink drain plumbing. These occur at sink flanges, waste pipe connections, garbage disposer, and drain stopper mechanisms. Often, the buyer or seller is unable to locate a reported leak. The reason has to do with the method of inspection. We don't just run water, we fill sinks (both sides on kitchen sinks) before draining. This method fills the waste piping with water and creates additional pressure; neither of which occurs when just running water.

Safety Tip of the Month: Drain pans & water heaters

The most common failure mode of water heaters is leakage. A drain pan piped to the exterior will eliminate the resultant water damage associated with slowly leaking water heaters. Leakage from garage water heaters frequently damages the house wall and penetrates the living space. Since drain pans are seldom mandated, they are seldom installed. If you are changing your water heater (or buying a new home), we recommend installing a drain pan under the unit (piped to the exterior).

Inspection class for realtors: Arizona Academy of Real Estate (Bell and 99th Ave) offers a **3 credit hour course** “lowering risk through inspection”. This course is taught by Mark Andrews (yours truly). I promise that it will be educational and fun! Contact the Academy for dates and details. Ph# 623 505 5380

Let our experience work for you!



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