



Take a closer look at your cast iron soil pipe

You may not have noticed, but we've had a war of words going on over the issue of imported Chinese cast iron soil pipe. In our May issue, we ran a letter from an importer of Chinese cast iron pipe that said that an ad run by the Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute was an unjustified attack on its product. This month, we're running a letter in response from Bill LeVan, executive vice president of the Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute, who establishes CISPI as the authority on codes and standards for cast iron pipe.

The applicable standards come from CISPI and ASTM International, which was previously known as the American Society for Testing and Materials. A typical specification may read, "All drain, waste, vent, sewer, and storm lines shall be of cast iron soil pipe and fittings and shall conform to the requirements of CISPI Standard 301, ASTM A 888, or ASTM A 74. Pipe and fittings shall be marked with a collective trademark of the Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute or receive prior approval of the engineer." ASTM A 888 is the Standard Specifications for Hubless Cast Iron Soil Pipe and Fittings. ASTM A 74 is the Standard Specifications for Hub and Spigot Cast Iron Soil Pipe and Fittings.

Mr. LeVan notes in his letter, "Their statements relating to formal acceptance of their products by 'a multitude of jurisdictions' and 'thousands more jurisdictions of a third party certification agency' are wrong. The reason is simple. Jurisdictions do not accept, approve, or endorse individual sellers or manu-

facturers of products. Nor do standards setting bodies such as ASTM and the model plumbing codes. Products (not sellers or manufacturers) complying with the product standards referenced in the code are acceptable in individual states and locales, but they do not go through some sort of acceptance procedure other than inspection in the field on an installed basis. Nowhere in any plumbing code is there a list of accepted manufacturers or sellers. Moreover, in at least two recent instances where importers have gone outside the customary process and sought approval from a government agency or jurisdiction, they have failed.

Mr. LeVan continues, "Their statements relating to 'third party certification agencies' are also wrong. Nowhere in the ASTM or CISPI standards

for cast iron soil pipe and fittings is there a provision for 'third party certifications.' The only entity that can certify conformance of products to the cast iron soil pipe and fittings standards is the manufacturer. The word 'manufacturer' is defined in both standards as 'the entity that casts the pipes and fittings.' The writers

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of the letter are not the manufacturers but the purchasers and resellers of products other manufacturers have produced overseas.

Importers of cast iron pipe rely on dozens, if not hundreds, of foundries in China. Some of them probably do fine work, since the Chinese have been working with cast iron since 500 B.C. Others undoubtedly have the same quality control problems that have beset Chinese manufacturers of everything from pharmaceuticals to toys.

Some imported cast iron pipe has shown up on our shores that is, at best, of uneven quality, and at worst has varying wall thicknesses that in some places is so thin that it threatens the ability of the pipe to hold water.

We've also heard reports that some quality control test reports from

Chinese manufacturers strain credulity with all the reports, for example, written in the same pen with the same hand and credited to an inspector who evidently worked 24 hours a day. We've heard of tests supposedly run on sample materials that are all identical down to a thousandth of an inch and the tests result in identical performance on each and every test piece.

Contractors should look for the CISPI mark on cast iron pipe, preferably cast into the metal on fittings and stenciled onto the pipe. They should insist that the cast iron pipe that they install be certified as meeting either CISPI Standard 301 or ASTM A 888 or both, depending on the requirements of their local plumbing code.

Contractors should be wary of pipe that does not appear to be properly marked or bears only a sticker on it rather than having the country of origin and the manufacturer's name or registered trademark on the pipe.

If any material put into a building fails, the owner and his representatives are going to come back to the contractor to get it set right. Contractors have to take a close look at every item they install, including cast iron soil pipe.