

focus on connectors & fittings

The Right Connection

Connecting and joining pipes may be common practice for water dealers, but there are always ways to improve efficiency and workmanship in order to provide your customers a quality system.

Joe Huemann, president of Huemann Water Conditioning, has lead WQA classes on the topic and recently spoke with Stephanie Harris, managing editor, about best pipe-joining practices for dealers.

By Stephanie Harris

Water dealer shares best practices for joining pipes

Transitions & Fittings

According to Huemann, when making a transition from one pipe to another, you always want to make a legal transition. One thing that is often overlooked is not installing dielectric unions when transitioning from galvanized piping to copper.

When you transition from galvanized to copper, you must use a dielectric union. That is a univer-

sal plumbing code, and sometimes people may want to cut costs and just screw on copper right to galvanized. It will work but it's illegal, and you may end up with galvanic action from the similar metals.

Fittings that push on, such as SharkBite push-fit fittings and John Guest push-to-connect fittings, have been very popular and will transition from CPVC to copper piping. These

transitional fittings are nice because they will still connect if there is water in the pipes. With copper, the pipe has to be completely dry before you can solder. If you just cut the pipe and put your push-in fitting on there, you can use that to start your transition from the old piping to the new.

These fittings are beneficial when you have a copper pipe that is dripping water and you cannot get it to stop. What you can do is have either a union or ball valve already made up, sweated with a small nipple on it, then you just hook on with a fitting and you can transition to your new work and keep going.

I can walk into a restaurant that's open 24-hours, for example, and say that I'm going to shut the water off. I can cut in a shutoff and bypass in 15 to 20 minutes, whereas if I have to drain the whole store down, it may

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take two hours. So I can go into an operation and virtually say, 'for the next 15 minutes, you're not going to have water because we have to shut the water off and install these valves.' If you plan it out ahead of time, you can just cut and snip and you're back in business in no time.

The transition point between plastic and copper or steel is a concern point. Plastic pipe is wonderful, but when you transition, that's the point where you will often get a leak. When you go from steel or copper to plastic, make sure that the plastic is always the male piece, and that will eliminate a lot of your risk. The galvanized or copper piece will be the female end, so the plastic is always screwing into the copper or galvanized piping.

PVC and CPVC have either male or female threads, and you can transition to either galvanized or copper with those threads. When you use PVC or CPVC, always use the PVC or CPVC as the male fitting then attach that to the steel fitting, which would be a female.

One of the most important things with transitions is to make sure your pipes are compatible. Ensure that your pipe compounds and glues, primers and solvents are compatible with your plastics.

Working with PEX

Polyethylene (PEX) tubing has transitional fittings premade so they can go from copper to PEX, and this is worth your while to invest in. It comes in a coil so you can string it around corners—every time you come to an angle, you just bend the tubing and keep stringing it along.

The advantage of PEX is that it is less labor intensive, but you must support it with hangers and supports to make it look nice. PEX are like a long spaghetti noodle where you can bend it and make it go wherever you want, where PVC, copper or galvanized are straight sticks of pipe and you have to put them on angles—straight, 90- or 45-degree angles.

The geometry of plumbing, however, is symmetrical and usually straight up and down. With PEX, they look more abstract—usually the consumer does not like looking at that because if you do not install it in a straight line, it will look bad. You have to be careful when installing it so that it's pleasing to the eye. It doesn't matter so much if it is behind the wall and the customer doesn't see

it, but if it is out in the open, run the pipe straight and make it look nice.

Reaming & Deburring

With transition fittings, always make sure that you clean the pipe and ream or deburr it to get the burrs off of the end. When you make a transition of a fitting, any burrs or rough edges will cause turbulence inside the flow, and that can cause wear and tear on your piping.

Not deburring or reaming the pipe is a step that people often become lazy about. There are reaming and deburring tools available that make it easy to ream the pipe. You can get these at your local plumbing wholesale place and they are relatively inexpensive, last a long time and make for a better joint.

Up to Code

Every dealer should always verify that the fittings you are using are approved through your local, county and state plumbing codes. If an inspector comes in and tags you, you will have to prove that your connectors are approved. This is most commonly done with new construction.

Dealers should always know what their state and local codes are for fittings. Generally, you will verify your local town's plumbing ordinance, then the county and state. The state usually has a minimum requirement and the locals can often be more restrictive. These codes change frequently, which is why it is so important that you stay involved with the Water Quality Association and your community. *wqp*

For more information, contact Joe Huemann at 815.385.3093.

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