



Advanced Drainage Systems garners pipe certification

By Matt Griswold

PLASTICS NEWS STAFF

HILLIARD, OHIO (August 19, 2008) -- Advanced Drainage Systems Inc. has received 100-year service life approval for its corrugated high density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe by the Florida Department of Transportation, which will open up the state's high-traffic arteries for the first time to the Hilliard-based pipe maker.

It took nine years of rigorous testing to get the Florida department to sign off on the 100-year designation, which is significant on several fronts.

First and foremost, concrete pipe makers no longer can claim to have the lowest life-cycle cost on the premise that their material will last a century while HDPE must be replaced after 50 years. Corrugated steel and PVC pipe also compete in the drainage industry.

Furthermore, Florida's approval should cause a trickle-down effect to other states that were waiting to see what Florida would do.

Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation and the Washington, D.C.-based American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials are looking at it now, Advanced Drainage Systems officials said.

"This dramatically improves our competitive position in Florida, and hopefully in other large, influential states," said Advanced Drainage Systems engineering Vice President Tom Fussner, in an August 15 telephone interview.

Both Advanced Drainage Systems officials and Gene Palermo credited HDPE use in the natural gas industry for helping pave the way for the important new approvals. Palermo is president of Friendsville, Tennessee-based Palermo Plastic Pipe Consulting. He also is the former technical director of the Irving, Texas-based Plastics Pipe Institute and was heavily involved in the approval process in Florida.

People need not look further than the natural gas industry for proof of HDPE's capability, Palermo said. Polyethylene has about 90 percent market share in the natural gas distribution market in the U.S. and is the most-used material in the world for that application, he said.

"When water leaks, people get wet," he said. "When gas leaks, people die. That's a very high-liability market. ... All of the advantages that [polyethylene] has in the natural gas industry, now people will start seeing in the drainage industry and other industries where [polyethylene] is now becoming a major player."

Greg Bohn, director of national engineering-East at Advanced Drainage Systems, concurred.

"We borrowed from past history with the gas-line industry," he said. "It really helped our efforts on the drainage side."

If the nation's highways were opened up to HDPE corrugated pipe, its overall market share could increase about 50 percent, Palermo said.

Not only is this a win for ADS, but a win for the plastics pipe industry and consumers, in general, Bohn said. "This will ultimately lower costs for taxpayers," he said.

ADS said most states were not up to the time-consuming, costly task of working with the firm for nine years to establish testing protocol and test the pipe. Company officials said they were grateful to Florida for paving the way.

Advanced Drainage Systems sells more than US\$1 billion (6.86 billion yuan) worth of pipe annually and operates 41 extrusion plants.

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