

Pex: A Service Material for the Future, Here Now!

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You have all seen it in one form or another, that orange plastic tubing, used primarily in these parts for hydronic heating systems (in the floor). PEX is the acronym for poly extruded tubing or cross-linked polyethylene. PEX was developed and put into wide spread use in Europe around 1967. It was first introduced into

this country around 1984, and since then, it has managed to gain wide spread acceptance within the plumbing industry. It is accepted by every major code system and is NSF certified. What made me look into the possibility that this material could be used for water service lines? The current high cost of copper tubing! Now I am, and probably will always be, a copper tubing/Ductile Iron pipe man, but when push comes to shove,



(these copper prices are outrageous), I started looking into alternative materials. I can say, with great certainty, that I do not approve of that black plastic tubing that has been used in our industry for many years.

Some of the newer HDPE tubing has gained acceptance, but this PEX intrigues me. I like the bright orange color, which makes it easier to see when excavating. I also like the nice selection of fittings available. The crimping tool is a one-time purchase, and can be used in tight quarters. Fittings and tubing are available at most plumbing supply houses and builders supply houses (Home Depot and Lowe's). The material is resistant to chemicals and temperature. You can buy a 500 ft. roll of 3/4 inch (.75) PEX for about \$225.00. That is a lot of water services!

When installing PEX tubing, remember to follow the manufacturers recommendations. The tubing will shrink about one inch for every 10-degree drop in temperature, so you want to leave it like a snake in the trench, not straight and tight. Like all other plastic materials, it is a good idea to tape a 14-gauge wire to the tubing for location purposes. Likewise, it is important to utilize the proper fittings for the job. There are

copper crimp rings, as well as, stainless steel.

I think we will be seeing a lot more use in new construction and remodeling. The first time I actually got a good look at the material was a few years ago when we built a new DPW garage in our village. We wanted to put the heat in the concrete slab and decided on PEX tubing. It was interesting to see the contractor working with the material. It was wintertime and the tubing remained quite flexible and by using a plastic pipe cutter, he was able to make clean square cuts with ease. I must admit, it never occurred to me at the time that this might be a good water service material. I would be interested in talking to you if anyone from our membership is currently utilizing PEX tubing for water services in their system.

While copper tubing was always my first choice, I have to admit that this material is intriguing. ♪

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