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March 22 is International World Water Day:
U.S. Can Achieve Sustainability in Water By Ending Corrosion in Piping Infrastructure

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Washington, D.C. March 21 – March 22 is International World Water Day, established nineteen years ago by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to highlight water scarcity around the world and the need to use water wisely. In recognition of this important event, the PVC Pipe Association today urged lawmakers to put an end to closed procurement policies that exclude corrosion-proof piping materials from being used in water and wastewater infrastructure.

Each year, more than 300,000 water main breaks occur throughout North America – or some 850 every day – mainly as a result of the continued use of corrosion-prone iron piping in the nation’s water systems. Corroded, leaking pipes are responsible for the loss of 2.6 trillion gallons of drinking water every year, or 17 percent of all water pumped in the U.S. Moreover, according to a congressional study, corrosion costs U.S. drinking water and wastewater systems over $50.7 billion annually, or more than $1 trillion over the next twenty years.

“International World Water Day is a time to advocate for the sustainable management of freshwater resources and it’s an opportune time to look squarely at how our water resources are delivered and used here at home,” said PVC Pipe Association Executive Director Bruce Hollands. “Given the staggering costs of lost water supply every day, governments should require that taxpayer dollars invested in local infrastructure be spent in an open and competitive manner so that all pipe technologies are considered. This will not only ensure that taxpayers get the best bang for the buck, but this process will drive innovation, resulting in more efficient, cost-effective, environmentally sustainable water systems.”

Unfortunately, procurement practices are largely outdated at the local level and the solution for many local officials is a simple band-aid approach of repairing or replacing our water mains with the same outdated iron pipes that currently make up much of our underground water systems.

“This material hasn’t stood up to the test of time so it makes no sense to waste taxpayer dollars by installing more of it. Ratepayers are being asked to conserve water on one hand, while paying for trillions of gallons of lost water supply on their utility bills on the other. These practices are not environmentally or economically sustainable,” commented Mr. Hollands.
Corrosion-proof technologies exist. PVC pipe is a totally recyclable and extremely durable alternative to traditional corrosion-prone piping materials. A review by Engineering News Record in 1999 found PVC pipe to be one of the top twenty engineering advancements in more than a century. An American Water Works Association Research Foundation study confirms the life expectancy of PVC pipe to be in excess of 110 years, and a European report determined its longevity at 170 years.

PVC pipe manufacturing is extremely efficient; with virtually 100 percent of the PVC compound being used. It takes four times less energy to make than concrete pipe, and half that used for iron pipe. PVC pipe’s ultra-smooth surface reduces pumping costs and its leak-free joints eliminate water loss. But PVC pipe’s greatest environmental attribute is perhaps its exceptional durability and corrosion-resistance – leading to better water conservation and lower replacement, maintenance and repair costs.

Despite its many environmental attributes, PVC is often excluded from bidding on local water infrastructure projects and that needs to change. Open competition, an American value, must be the operating principle upon which all government procurement takes place, especially in the water and wastewater sector.

“It will require significant investment to get America’s water systems modernized and end the waste of trillions of gallons of drinking water each year,” Hollands said. “Replacing corroded iron pipes with leak-and corrosion-proof PVC pipe is a positive step toward cost-effective and long-term sustainable infrastructure and water management. But to get there we must have fair competition, which drives innovation and keeps infrastructure renewal more affordable. It’s the key to helping the U.S. reduce its water footprint and to achieving its water sustainability objectives.”

The PVC Pipe Association www.uni-bell.org is a non-profit organization that serves the engineering, regulatory, public health and standardization communities (http://www.uni-bell.org/)