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PVC Pipe Association Addresses U.S. Conference of Mayors Water Council on Need to Modernize Local Procurement of Piping Infrastructure

Washington, D.C., April 18 – PVC Pipe Association Executive Director Bruce Hollands urged the nation’s mayors last week to put an end to closed bidding practices that exclude corrosion-proof piping materials from being used in water and wastewater systems. “Building and replacing water and sewage lines will cost upwards of $1.1 trillion over the next twenty years. This will place tremendous strain on cash-strapped local governments so it only makes sense to utilize the most efficient procurement methods and cost-effective technologies possible,” said Hollands. Mr. Hollands made these comments during a presentation to the U.S. Conference of Mayors Water Council on April 12th in Indianapolis, IN.

Every 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.

The evidence is overwhelming that corrosion, not just age, is eating away our underground water systems. Replacing old corroded metallic pipes with new ones made of the same material is not economically or environmentally sustainable. “Every mayor and local elected official has the ability, and perhaps the obligation, to review the local procurement practices of their utility staff. This provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that bidding is aligned with modern asset management standards, and considers life-cycle costs and performance of materials in all public projects,” noted Hollands.

Numerous articles over the last year in the American Water Works Association Journal and the general media have pointed to the need for water utilities to open up procurement practices to alternative piping materials. Current purchasing methods are costly and prevent informed decisions from being made because bids are often closed to qualified bidders. Opening them, according to experts, will save municipalities and utilities between 10 and 20 percent on all goods and services purchased.
“There is a growing trend towards greater use of non-corroding, sustainable piping materials like PVC among municipalities. Clearly, the math is beginning to sink in,” said Hollands. Recently, the City of Duncan, OK voted unanimously to allow PVC pipe in its material specifications as a means to control costs. Some members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Water Council have already made the switch. In 2010, then Co-Chair of the Mayors Water Council, Schenectady (NY) Mayor Brian Stratton mandated his utility staff to open up bidding to alternative materials like PVC pipe.

“For the past decade, 90 percent of the City of Pleasanton’s pipe installations have involved PVC, which has been shown to be 70 percent cheaper than ductile iron pipe. Pleasanton’s demonstrated progress and outside recognition have come from being adaptive, flexible and open to better technologies such as PVC pipe,” according to Pleasanton (CA) Mayor Jennifer Hosterman, who is currently Co-Chair of the Mayors Water Council.

PVC pipe is a completely 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, while a European report determined its longevity at 170 years.

Cities that have opened up their bidding processes to more cost-effective, corrosion-proof piping materials have benefitted from the competition. Potential savings are huge. At a recent congressional hearing on the state of America’s water infrastructure a municipal witness cited the cost to install ductile iron pipe at $1.5 million per mile. Hollands noted that it costs about $500,000 to install the same length of PVC pipe.

“Clearly it’s time more utilities open up their bidding processes so that significant cost savings can be realized. This will ensure that taxpayers get the best bang for the buck, driving innovation and resulting in more efficient and sustainable water systems,” said Hollands.

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/)