

15 August 2018

HOW PLASTIC PIPES COULD CONTRIBUTE MORE TO SUSTAINABILITY AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

By Caroline Ayres, Director, BPF Pipes Group

Plastic pipes have transformed our utility networks, meaning that today waste water is transported safely and securely, and in much greater quantities than in times gone by. In today's civil engineering and building environments, plastics are an essential part of our drainage and sewerage systems.

Drains and sewers made from plastic contribute significantly to sustainable development in the utility and civils sector, with low impact during both manufacturing and whole life, through minimal waste, recycling capabilities and built-in robustness, designed to last many decades.

How do plastic drains and sewers contribute to the circular economy?

Firstly, by ensuring plastic pipes are fit for purpose through the availability of good quality standards and testing, the choice of product can be optimised for the application. Secondly, by reducing plastic waste at source. Plastic pipe manufacturers already do this, with highly efficient manufacturing operations that minimise waste and re-integrate off-cuts into the process. Finally, we have good product standards in place, and with modern engineered materials, these are being developed to encourage an even wider use of recycled plastics.

There is a great deal of plastic consumer waste that can now be made into plastic pipes: for example, for cable ducting, drainage and stormwater management applications. The renewed global focus on plastic waste and what to do with it creates some potentially viable opportunities to make plastic pipes and systems truly part of the circular economy.

Highways organisations are actively using recycled plastics for road stormwater drainage, working with manufacturers of plastic pipes in several forward-thinking projects. Certification has been achieved through British Board of Agrément (BBA) standards, to ensure these products are suitable for this most taxing of environments.

Industry initiatives

Operation Clean Sweep is an internationally run programme, led in the UK by the British Plastics Federation, designed to prevent resin pellet, flake and powder loss, and to help keep this material out of the marine environment. For the many companies that have already signed up to the programme, site audits are undertaken to identify transfer points and potential 'spill' areas, worksite set-ups are reviewed, training programmes implemented and prevention, containment and clean-up procedures put in place. Manufacturers signed up to Operation Clean Sweep produce almost 50 per cent of the total volume of plastic material processed in the UK.

A number of independent initiatives have been undertaken by other UK manufacturers to ensure that plastic is well-contained and controlled and does not randomly enter the environment. With the help of updated legislation, many more initiatives could take place to keep plastics under control and provide useful modern engineered, recycled, pipe products in the future.

The future

Manufacturers are constantly striving to do more to recycle and reuse plastics. Even the world's raw polymer manufacturers are beginning to acquire plastics recycling companies to enable them to be able to expand the use of such plastics.

Now is certainly the time to enable the use of more recycled plastics in pipes for drains and sewers to strengthen their contribution to a circular economy.

See more at http://www.bpf.co.uk/Sustainability/Operation_Clean_Sweep

ENDS

PHOTO-CAPTION: Highways organisations are actively using products made from recycled plastics for road stormwater drainage

Contacts

Media information:

Bridget Summers, Footprint PR, 01723 447424, bridget@footprintpr.org.uk

BPF Pipes Group:

Caroline Ayres, BPF Pipes Group, 01932 343409, caroline.ayres@bfpipesgroup.com

About the BPF Pipes Group

Part of the British Plastics Federation, the BPF Pipes Group is a trade association representing manufacturers and material suppliers of plastic piping systems across the UK. Committed to sustainable construction, its aims are to provide a forum for the exchange of technical expertise between member companies and to promote the importance of plastic as a pipework material, for the full spectrum of above and below ground, pressure and non-pressure applications. It also plays a key role in initiating and disseminating research and informing and influencing the standards bodies pertaining to plastic pipe systems. It works closely with the BPF and TEPFA, the European Plastic Pipes and Fittings Association.