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## **CONTINUING THE VITAL PIPE SUPPLY CHAIN FOR UTILITIES**

During these unprecedented times, maintaining a robust supply chain for all the utilities is essential, but often goes unnoticed by the general public.

Continuity and safe supply are vital for the normal functioning of the UK utility network, and ongoing routine maintenance as well as emergency repairs help ensure an uninterrupted power and water supply source available 24/7. This applies to both the water and sewerage networks as well as to gas and electricity supplies.

UK plastic pressure and non-pressure pipe manufacturers have a key role to play in this, and as part of an important supply chain have adapted quickly from the initial lockdown shock to continue delivering a level of service which minimises risk to the utility sector. Plastic pipe suppliers say they are well-prepared and able to provide the robustness that utilities need in the current climate by maintaining their own internal supply chain via forward planning and risk management through to instigating appropriate social distancing measures and safe working practices for those in the manufacturing, administration and distribution areas.

As Caroline Ayres, BPF Pipes Group Director commented: “Our members have been working hard to ensure the supply chain for utilities continues to remain safe and secure, so that products required for emergency work in every utility sector as well as routine construction and maintenance are always available.”

Major scheduled utility infrastructure projects are continuing to some extent, where worker safety can be ensured, and the recent lighter volumes of road traffic have helped in this. Pipe supplies are continuing to be provided, with operators adhering to strict social distancing rules.

Factories where pipe materials and fittings are manufactured are maintaining a level of production to ensure that the supply chain for essential work and emergencies is not broken. The support roles they are playing are vital to keep utilities able to function as close to normal

as possible. Regarding site deliveries for example, pipe suppliers are photographing delivered items alongside a member of the contractor team as no signatures are currently possible, thus supporting new ways of working around social distancing protocols.

Builders' merchants have different procedures for accepting deliveries and these are also being complied with by pipe manufacturers. All sensible and appropriate safety measures are being taken. But as most of the supplying manufacturers are UK based, they have quickly adapted and developed a more agile way of working with flexibility of stock inventories and staff at regional depots. This means there is no impact on the relevant utility or ultimately, the end customer because of the localised aspects of supply, adapting and changing to the differing customer needs.

As there still remains uncertainty as to when and how the lockdown will be eased, it is essential that the flexible approach adopted by UK pipe manufacturers continues to reflect the ever changing landscape of the current situation in order to support the utility sectors, something BPF Pipes Group members are continuing to do. This is why it is essential that the utility supply chain remains stable, and BPF Pipes Group members are continuing to provide an important service.

The BPF Pipes Group provides several guidance documents on a variety of pipe-related subjects, which can be downloaded at <https://www.bfppipesgroup.com/support-downloads/specification-guidance/>