

Guidance on specifications for pipes and fittings for hot and cold water applications and heating inside buildings

Background

Plastic pipes and fittings for hot and cold water systems and heating inside buildings are now the preferred solution for most domestic installations. Systems are available in crosslinked polyethylene (PE-X), polyethylene with raised temperature performance (PE-RT), polybutylene (PB), polypropylene (PP), chlorinated polyvinylchloride (PVC-C) as well as multilayer pipes and their matching fittings.

British Standards, such as BS 4991 (first published 1974) and BS 7291 (first published in 1990) led the way in setting performance and installation principles. These early British Standards were used to formulate the UK's input into the development of European Standards. European Standards (EN) are now adopted in the UK directly as British Standards (BS EN).

The use of the correct standard for purchasing products which are suitable for their intended application ensures ease of installation and a long service life.

The purpose of this short guide is to provide information on the specifications for plastic pipes and fittings for domestic hot and cold water supply and domestic heating systems inside a building.

This information is applicable to residential properties such as private dwelling houses or multi-occupancy buildings and non-residential properties such as shops, halls etc. but does not cover systems in hospitals or similar accommodation for which guidance is available from the Department of Health and Social Care.

For technical information on system design, jointing, installation, and connection to other pipework systems inside a building, the BPF Pipes Group has produced guidance note "Domestic hot and cold water supply and central heating systems" (<https://bpfpipesgroup.com/support-downloads/technical-guidance/>).

For information on specifications for plastic pipes and fittings used for water supply to a building, the BPF Pipes Group has produced guidance note "Specifications for polyethylene pipe and fittings for water supply, drainage and sewerage under pressure" (<https://bfpipesgroup.com/support-downloads/specification-guidance/>).

Regulations

Readers of this guidance are reminded that when designing and installing new and replacement hot and cold water services, national legislation applies.

Product specifications for hot and cold water and heating

BS 7291 Thermoplastics pipe and fitting systems for hot and cold water for domestic purposes and heating installations in buildings.

BS 7291 is a three-part publication which identifies the requirements for a piping system and its components, in either crosslinked polyethylene (PE-X) or polybutylene (PB) materials. The scope covers piping systems specifically for UK Class S applications. This standard is applicable up to 110 mm nominal outside diameter.

Part 1 General requirements – this part specifies general requirements and methods of test for solid wall ('plain') pipes, barrier pipes to inhibit gas permeability and multilayer pipes including definitions, service conditions, performance and marking.

UK service conditions are defined in Table 1 of BS 7291-1 for:

- Indirect cold water systems;
- Direct mains-fed cold water systems;
- Subsurface heating systems;
- Vented hot water supply systems;
- Unvented hot water supply systems including instantaneous heaters and/or incorporating storage;
- Vented central heating systems and indirect hot water primary circuits; and
- Sealed central heating systems and indirect hot water primary circuits

Part 2 Specification for polybutylene (PB) pipes and associated fittings – this part specifies additional requirements to those given in Part 1 for polybutylene systems including materials, dimensions, and requirements for fittings.

Part 3 Specification for cross-linked polyethylene (PE-X) pipes and associated fittings – this part specifies additional requirements to those given in Part 1 for cross-linked polyethylene systems including materials, dimensions, and requirements for fittings.

NOTES:

BS 7291 does not cover continuously circulating and continuously refreshed pipework systems.

BS 7291-2: 2010 and BS 7291-3: 2010 refer to BS EN 1254-2 and BS EN 1254-3. Please read the section below on fittings for further advice.

BS EN ISO standards for plastics piping systems for hot and cold water installations

There are six British Standards for water for human consumption in domestic systems and for heating systems which have been developed collaboratively in CEN and ISO.

- BS EN ISO 15874 Plastics piping systems for hot and cold water installations – Polypropylene (PP)
- BS EN ISO 15875 Plastics piping systems for hot and cold water installations – Cross linked polyethylene (PE-X)
- BS EN ISO 15876 Plastics piping systems for hot and cold water installations – Polybutylene (PB)
- BS EN ISO 15877 Plastics piping systems for hot and cold water installations – Chlorinated Polyvinylchloride (PVC-C)
- BS EN ISO 21003 Multilayer piping systems for hot and cold water installations inside buildings
- BS EN ISO 22391 Plastics piping systems for hot and cold water installations – Raised temperature performance polyethylene (PE-RT)

The standards have been developed through cooperation between ISO and CEN and designated as EN ISO. The standards are therefore internationally recognised.

Under its membership of CEN, BSI automatically adopts all European Standards as British Standards.

Where additional information or clarification is required for UK applications, the BSI committee may add a National Foreword or National Annex which forms an important part of the standard. For this reason, the British Standard (BS EN ISO) together with any published amendments should always be consulted.

Each standard has the same structure, with the Part 1 (General), Part 2 (Pipes), Part 3 (Fittings) and Part 5 (Fitness for purpose).

NOTES:

The latest version of these BS EN ISO standards together with any published amendments are listed on the BSI website: <https://shop.bsigroup.com/>. Please read the section below on fittings for further advice.

Products included in these standards necessarily cater for a wide range of operating systems, not all of which are suitable for UK plumbing applications. Piping systems conforming to one of these standards, but not to BS 7291-1, should be additionally subjected to temperatures covered by Table 1 of BS 7291-1: 2010. This applies to systems of PB and PE-X where BS EN ISO 15876 or BS EN ISO 15875 is used to demonstrate performance in preference to BS

7291 (Part 1 and 2, or Part 1 and 3 respectively) and also to systems of PP, PVC-C and PE-RT where there is no materials-specific part to BS 7291 for these materials.

The British Plastics Federation (BPF) Pipes Group and its members recommend that products installed for UK operating conditions are tested against the service conditions in Table 1 of BS 7291-1: 2010.

Specifying fittings

BS EN ISO 15874-3: 2013, BS EN ISO 15875-3: 2003, BS EN ISO 15876-3: 2017, BS EN ISO 15877-3: 2009, BS EN ISO 21003-3: 2008 and BS EN ISO 22391-3:2009 specify that metallic fittings conform to BS EN 1254-3. Amendments have been published to each of these standards which delete reference to EN 1254-3 and add definitions, materials, dimensional and performance requirements. These 2021 amendments will be published by BSI.

BS 7291-2: 2010 and BS 7291-3: 2010 specify that metallic fittings shall be either compression fittings to BS EN 1254-2 and/or BS EN 1254-3¹ (or other metallic fittings which conform to BS 7291-1: 2010). BS 7291-2: 2010 and BS 7291-3: 2010 also need amending to delete reference to BS EN 1254-2 and BS EN 1254-3.

The British Plastics Federation (BPF) Pipes Group and its members recommend that metal fittings intended for use with plastic pipes to the BS EN ISO standards or BS 7291 are specified to Part 3 of the relevant BS EN ISO standard including all amendments.

NOTES:

BS EN 1254-2: 1998 and BS EN 1254-3: 1998 did not include a requirement for resistance to dezincification, a form of corrosion that happens when zinc is leached out of the alloy leaving a weakened porous copper fitting. Dezincification typically reduces the wall thickness of a fitting over time and therefore minimum wall thickness has traditionally been included in EN 1254 in place of testing and a requirement.

BS EN 1254-2: 1998 and BS EN 1254-3: 1998 have been revised and were replaced by BS EN 1254-2: 2021 and BS EN 1254-3: 2021; the minimum wall thickness requirement has been removed but a requirement for resistance to dezincification has not been added. This presents a risk that a metallic fitting might not satisfy the service set out in the standards for plastic piping systems for hot and cold water installations.

Compression fittings conforming to BS EN 1254-2: 1998 and BS EN 1254-3: 1998 may continue to be specified for use with plastic piping systems.

¹ BS EN 1254-2 Copper and copper alloys. Plumbing fittings - Compression fittings for use with copper tubes.
BS EN 1254-3 Copper and copper alloys. Plumbing fittings – Compression fittings for use with plastics pipes