

ASTM B05 Workshop – Fall 2017

Flint: From Water Crisis to Opportunity

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The issue of lead in drinking water is not new—it's been around for decades, brought to the surface by the dangers its exposure can have on communities as a whole. However, the issue goes beyond water quality. As our nation's water distribution infrastructure ages, utilities and municipalities are fighting a losing battle against leaks, changing water supplies, regulatory requirements and plumbing design changes.

As the U.S. enters what many are referring to as the "Replacement Era" – a time where much of the nation's drinking water infrastructure needs to be replaced – the decisions that city officials and homeowners make and the materials that they select will have consequences long into the future. This has never been made clearer than in Flint, Michigan.

Flint has begun to turn the corner, from a city in a drinking water crisis, to a city seizing the opportunity to create a resilient, responsive, and reliable drinking water system for the future. That system includes 20,000 – 29,000 water service lines, made of either lead, or lead-contaminated galvanized steel that will be replaced over the next three years. While there are several different piping materials available, copper tube and fittings have a long history of safely conveying drinking water. It has the long-term, proven experience of reliable, leak-free installation in the widest variety of systems and settings, protects the water system from outside contamination in the underground environment and does so with proven life-cycle value.

It's for reasons such as these that Flint, Michigan, chose to replace its lead and lead-affected service lines with copper piping when toxins were found in their residents' water supply. Andrew Kireta Jr., Vice President of the Copper Development Association (CDA) will discuss the decision process Flint used in evaluating copper against other materials, why they decided copper was the right choice for their service line replacements, and how their findings will support other utilities and municipalities in making the same decision for replacing the 10 million lead service lines still in service in North America.