



# ITEMS

NEWSLETTER

July 2005

## Importer's Advertising Misleads the Market With False Information



AB&I has discovered misleading claims being made in the advertising for an East Coast based importer of cast iron soil pipe and fittings. The advertising appears in a major trade journal, and could lead to confusion on the part of the public or the contracting community.

The first false claim made in this advertising refers to the quality of their product. This company claims their cast iron pipe is "the industry's best..." Why not make a claim nobody can substantiate? Do they mean that the iron used is free of the asbestos, arsenic

---

*"All AB&I products are 100% Made in America, meet all industry standards, and satisfy the requirements of all building codes."*

---

and other contaminants found in some imported pipe? Do they mean that their wall thickness is more even than their competitors? Or maybe they mean that their coating is the best in the industry. We simply don't know.

What we do know, however, is that the pipe this importer sells comes from multiple unrelated plants in Asia. Do all of these plants produce the industry's "best" pipe? Somehow, we doubt that.

We also know that Asian foundries were so unsure of the quality of their product that they went to court recently in the U.S. to exempt themselves from the product liability claims that result from poor quality material being installed in the U.S. Does this sound like an industry that truly believes their product to be "the best?"

Another claim made in the advertising states that this importer's pipe and fittings

"have all the approvals needed for use in your area." What approvals? Who approved their products, and for what? The fact is, there are no regulatory or industry organizations that "approve" anything. They simply don't exist. There are listing and standards bodies that work to assure quality, but they don't issue any approvals, and to state that they do is misleading and false. The fact is that none of these products is listed by the Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute, the leading cast iron authority in our business. Not one of them.

There is no such thing as "approved," and there is just no way that their pipe is "the best." The next question we all should ask is, if this importer is willing to mislead the market in the short term through its advertising, how big is this importer's commitment to the vitality of our industry in the long term?

### In this issue...

- ✓ Kip's Perspective
- ✓ Tigger
- ✓ Product Specialist
- ✓ No Price Increase
- ✓ Just for Fun



## Perspective

# Is Courtesy Dead, and Why My Customers' Customers Are Bugging Me

I was driving to work the other day, stopped at a red light and waiting to turn right when a pedestrian caught my eye. He was crossing in the crosswalk in front of me, and when he saw that I was waiting to turn right, he quickened his step so as not to delay me any more than necessary. He then said "thank you" to me as he passed in front of my car. I didn't think much of it at first, but then it got me thinking. When was the last time I witnessed an act of what was once referred to as "common courtesy" by a complete stranger? It seems like, most of the time when encountering a person in a crosswalk or a pedestrian in a mall parking lot, the mindless stroll and dagger-like stare is more likely to be the reaction.

I was reminded of the recent fender-bender I nearly had with a well-dressed woman in her thirties. We were both turning left into multiple lanes when we nearly collided. I'm not sure whose fault it was, if anybody's, but I am sure of the reaction she had to the event. At the next stoplight, she rolled down her window and proceeded to call me every name in the book, impugning everything from my age to my sexuality, throwing in countless choice words I don't generally hear on a daily basis, especially not from a woman.

I tried not to react much, partly because I was taken aback by her diatribe, and partly because I was raised not to fight with girls. Anyway, the light turned green and we each went our separate ways.

I was reminded by this and other events in recent memory that courtesy between strangers is getting harder to come by. The simple "sorry," or "you're welcome" has now been too often replaced with a threatening demeanor or complete indifference. Not always, but too fre-

quently for my taste. Have we gotten to the point where we truly don't like each other, or are we just too busy to take the time to say "thanks?" I fear it's a little of both. Courtesy has been replaced with something else lately, something more akin to the territorial imperative found in the animal kingdom. "Step on my turf and you're dead meat" seems to be the mentality of too many people these days, reacting to unintentional encroachments on personal space with threats rather than simple understanding and a kinder, "no problem." It could be bound up with the trend toward the uncommunity. For too many people, there is no connection to their neighbors, their government, or their local baseball team. It's every man for himself, baby, and don't get in my way.

The place I see this trend least prevalent, oddly enough, is in the business community. While there are difficult and unreasonable people there, too, it is less common than in the general community at large. It's as though those of us in business understand in our DNA that we need each other to accomplish our objectives; that being courteous is just, well, normal. As a practical matter, it just doesn't work to be unpleasant with the people you deal with in the working world. Life, and work, is more fun when everybody gets along, and sometimes that means giving a little slack to a colleague or customer who goes over the line a little.

That woman who called me all those bad names bugged me a little, but that guy in the crosswalk brought me back to what I hope is reality, at least for most people. He reminded me of how easy it is to make things nicer for somebody else, and in so doing, making it better for ourselves. It's a concept that is as old as time, but perhaps never easier to forget than in our busy times.

I heard on the radio of recent work by a neuroscientist at Stony Brook University and a composer, who have teamed up to create music and sounds that evoke specific emotions in people who hear them. So far, they've been able to create sounds that arouse women and cause men to become very nervous and agitated. They're working on other sounds, too. As for me, I just want to know what sounds cause plumbers to want to buy iron pipe. When they get that one perfected, we'll send you all a CD.

Some of my customers' customers have been getting on my case lately. It seems some of them are angry at the price increases that came down last year, and want AB&I to sell them product at the old price. It seems that some of them got hurt bidding jobs at the old price, and got caught off guard when prices went up. We understand the difficulties and risks involved in bidding a job 6-12 months out. Our suppliers do not guarantee prices to us, and the only way we can control our costs is to buy enough inventory to support our commitments. That's just business.

AB&I does not provide price protection to anybody. Some of you have heard that we do it for so-and-so, but won't do it for you. Cow pucky. If we did provide protection, we'd do it for everyone. The reality is that we've tried it and learned that price protection doesn't work. Instead, what we try to do is give everybody as much warning about upcoming price increases as possible. We used to give the market up to six months advance warning, but that policy went the way of the buggy whip when scrap iron began being sold on the world market. Today, we're lucky to learn about raw materials price hikes days in advance, much less months. More later.

## What You Don't Know About Tigger... A man with a heart; real and artificial!

Paul Winchell, a famed ventriloquist best remembered as the voice of Tigger in the *Winnie-the-Pooh* series, has died. He was 82.

Winchell had a long and illustrious career in show business, serving as the voice of many cartoon characters. He won a Grammy in 1974 for his work on *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

His show business career started in 1936, with a radio audition, and he never stopped working in the business he loved.

In 1986, Winchell won a nearly \$18 million verdict against Metromedia, Inc. in a dispute over ownership rights of his children's shows made in the 1960s. The proceeds from that verdict enabled

Winchell to pursue a part of his life known by few, but perhaps far more influential than his voice work in Hollywood.

For example, Winchell devoted much time, resources and

energy to developing fish farming in Africa as a means of fighting hunger in that desperate continent and building a sustainable economy.

He also published several books and other writings on Christian theology.

Perhaps most surprisingly, Winchell was an accomplished inventor. His early work resulted in the development of an invisible garter belt, a flameless cigarette lighter, and an early version of the disposable razor.

He later turned his talents to more substantial product development, earning a patent for a prototype artificial heart he built in the same workshop he used to build the ventriloquist dummies used in his showbiz pursuits.

"He was more or less a self-taught Renaissance man," said his long-time friend and collaborator on many projects, Johnny Blue Star. So now you know...



## Engineers Find AB&I Product Specialist to be Valuable Information Resource



Gregg Carr, AB&I's Product Engineering Specialist, reports considerable success in changing the perception of cast iron pipe and fittings among plumbing engineers and product specifiers.

"I really enjoy talking to these [engineers]," reports Carr, who visits the specifier community across the country to extol the virtues of cast iron DWV material.

In several cases, AB&I products have been approved for use in a project that, previous to Gregg's visits, excluded cast iron from the jobsite. "The more the engineers learn about cast iron DWV," says Carr, "the better they like it."

In addition to promoting AB&I products, Carr takes the time to educate the market about the risks inherent in using some imported material. "On one project, when the engineers found out what imported material was being used, they threw it off the job."

## Rumors of Pending Price Increases Unfounded

It has come to our attention that rumors are circulating that another price increase on cast iron DWV is planned sometime this year. AB&I wishes to put those rumors to

rest. There is no price increase anticipated in the near future. Let us repeat that. There is no price increase anticipated in the near future. Scrap prices have stabilized on the world market. The huge demand for scrap seen by China in the past years has moderated, either because the Chinese economy is moderating or because they have found alternative sources of iron. In any case, the extreme demand pressures on scrap have eased considerably, thereby easing the need to increase prices on products made with iron. As usual, if AB&I foresees the need for a price increase due to changing circumstances in the work market for scrap, we will give the market as much notice as possible.





## Lab Tests Show Advantages of Using Only American-Made Couplings

A leading coupling supplier recently picked up an imported coupling he found in the market and sent it to a lab for testing. Since the coupling was marked CSA, it was assumed it was approved to Canadian standards. Several other couplings from the same importer were gathered from around the country and sent to the lab for testing. Two dramatic findings came out of these lab tests: 1) The gaskets used in the couplings were so far out of spec that they didn't pass to the standard for tensile strength, fluid immersion, and ozone resistance (life expectancy test); 2) Although marked "neoprene," the gaskets were actually made from a totally different, unidentified



AB&I recommends American-made couplings for use with AB&I pipe and fittings

material. No wonder the gaskets didn't pass the test for neoprene!

As a result of these tests, AB&I strongly recommends that only US-produced couplings be used with AB&I pipe and fittings. Problems associated with leaking or faulty couplings can be quite expensive to repair. Distributor and contractor beware.

As a side note, this importer provided samples of their product to the "listing agencies" that passed the tests, but then manufactured their products using a different material that failed. The ethical issues are obvious. What kind of a supplier would do such a thing? And what value or meaning is their to the product listing?

### Just for Fun...

#### Test Your Knowledge of Famous Movie Quotes and Win a Free Golf Shirt

The American Film Institute (AFI) recently announced its list of Top 100 quotes from U.S. movies. See how many of these you can get right. Fax this page back to AB&I at 510/632-8035. The first response with the most correct answers will win a free AB&I golf shirt. Here goes...

1. "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
2. "I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
3. "You don't understand. I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I could've been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Actor \_\_\_\_\_
4. "All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my closeup."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Actor \_\_\_\_\_
5. "You talking to me?"  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Actor \_\_\_\_\_
6. "What we have here is a failure to communicate."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
7. "I love the smell of napalm in the morning."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
8. "The stuff that dreams are made of."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_



10. "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
11. "A census taker once tried to test me. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice Chianti."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
12. "There's no crying in baseball!"  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
13. "After all, tomorrow is another day."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
14. "I'll have what she's having."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
15. "You're gonna need a bigger boat."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
16. "We rob banks."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
17. "You had me at 'hello'."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_ Actor \_\_\_\_\_
18. "They call me Mr. Tibbs."  
Movie Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Actor \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

