

Mid-Shore Board of REALTORS®
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Old plumbing and pipes on the Eastern Shore

Easton, MD (November 2023) From providing a hot shower at the end of a long day, to taking the wastewater out of our home without a smell, the indoor plumbing system is an unsung hero of our everyday lives. We rarely even stop to think about the complexities involved in providing a clean glass full of water from our sinks until we step in a puddle on the floor. The indoor plumbing systems in our homes have been constructed throughout the past 150 years of many different materials and some of those materials have lasted better than others. Daniel Morris, a Certified Master Inspector with Blackwater Home Inspectors is a preferred partner with Mid-Shore Board of REALTORS and will relay some of the materials that throughout the years have shown to be deficient and how to identify them.

When referencing residential plumbing, we generally are talking about our supply piping and drain piping. Let's talk about two materials found in the mid-shore area that have common issues, these are polybutylene piping, and galvanized steel.

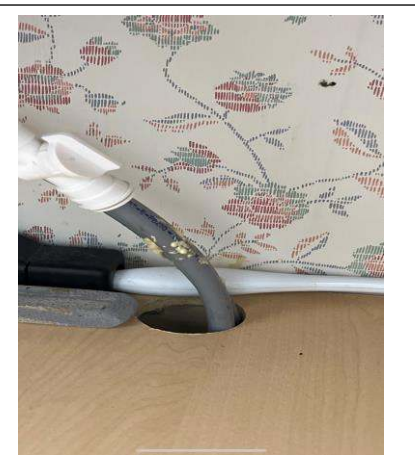
Polybutylene piping was introduced in the late 1970s and used through the mid-1990s. Gray in appearance when installed in a home, the lettering "PB-2110" is often printed on the pipe. It was flexible, cheap, and easy to install material. The piping was installed in millions of homes throughout the U.S. because of those qualities. However, polybutylene piping has shown that it is more prone to leaks and deterioration of the pipe material itself. Several class action lawsuits against the manufacturers have taken place and at this point the pipe is considered obsolete and in need of replacement. Mobile homes, and manufactured homes were often plumbed with this piping material, and it is still common to find these materials today. If you live in a home built in the 80s or 90s, take a second to look under your sink to see if you see any exposed gray piping.

Galvanized steel was a product introduced in the 1940s. It consisted of a steel pipe that was dipped in a zinc coating to prevent corrosion. However, over time and water running through the pipe, the zinc coating on the interior of the piping can wash away. This leads to the piping corroding on the inside, and slowly closing the pipe in. Oftentimes rust particles are introduced into the water, contaminating the water. It often will restrict the flow of water and result in a loss of water pressure. This piping can be identified by a dull, grayish/silver appearance. When the pipe is scratched it will be shiny, as opposed to lead which will be dull in color. To best test the performance of this pipe, it is recommended you run multiple water fixtures for two minutes and water for noticeable dips in water pressure. This piping material is past its life span at this point, and replacement of the material is recommended.

All water pipes can leak, not just the two that are described above. Plumbing leaks are not just a minor inconvenience but can often lead to structural damage to a home if the leak is not caught quickly. There are several pieces of technology now that can help detect these leaks before they become an issue. There are small water alarms that can be placed in areas to detect any leaks. Whole house leak detection meters that are installed on your water main that can shut off the water to the home if a leak is detected. Even some water heaters are coming installed with leak detectors. If you have questions about your plumbing system a plumbing contractor or even a local home inspector can often be of assistance.

Daniel Morris, Certified Master Inspector with Blackwater Home Inspectors is a preferred partner with Mid-Shore Board of REALTORS and can be reached at 443-528-1633 or email him at. The company website is Blackwaterhomeinspections.com.

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Polybutylene piping