

“NO SHORTCUTS TO QUALITY”

SAPPMA warns against cost cutting as pipe manufacturers return to work after lockdown

Johannesburg, 8 May 2020. South Africa, like the rest of the world, is facing a stark new reality of “life after lockdown” as the outbreak of the Coronavirus recently forced companies to shut down their operations for five weeks. As pipe manufacturers have now been allowed to resume their operations, many of them have to do so with a reduced workforce and a negatively impacted cash flow. The Southern African Plastic Pipe Manufacturers Association (SAPPMA) has urged pipe makers and pipeline installers to avoid giving into the temptation of compromising on quality or sidestepping certain processes and procedures for the sake of saving a few Rands.

“Piping systems is one of the key elements of a country’s infrastructure. Communities are relying on the fact that the pipes we provide for their water, sewage, telecommunication and gas supply, will last for fifty to a hundred years before they need replacing. Similarly, a wide spectrum of industries, such as mining, agriculture, telecommunication, building and construction also need pipelines they can trust as the cost of failure in terms of disruption and repairs is prohibitive,” says Jan Venter, Chief Officer of SAPPMA.

SAPPMA is an association of leading companies in the plastics piping business, with the purpose of facilitating high standards of ethics, product quality and technical information. It’s primary focus is to create absolute customer confidence in the plastics pipe industry by ensuring that pipes produced by its members and bearing the SAPPMA mark, meet local and international quality and manufacturing standards.

However, Venter warns past experience has shown that manufacturers quickly look for ways to save money or take shortcuts when the economy takes a downward turn. “Without continuous intervention, product quality and standards inevitably deteriorate. We then end up seeing things like pipes that are underweight or shorter in length entering the market, companies using substandard procedures, skipping certain quality tests or including recycled materials,” he says.

For this reason, SAPPMA members undergo regular announced and unannounced factory visits during which every step of the production process is inspected and pipe samples are randomly picked and sent away for testing by an independent body. Only once the compliance officer is satisfied that every standard has been met, are members allowed to display the SAPPMA logo on their pipes as guarantee of quality, reliability and dependability.

“It is important to understand that seeing the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS), South African Technical Auditing Service (SATAS) or SANS logo displayed on a pipe does not mean that the pipe automatically meets SAPPMA standards or that it was produced by a SAPPMA member. The first two are certification bodies who work closely with us to test and certify the pipe samples we send to them. The South African National Standards (SANS) on the other hand, is part of the SABS and is the custodian of the national standards according to which all locally produced pipes are manufactured,” Venter says. He explains that SAPPMA is not in competition with these entities, but plays a crucial coordinating role between all the stakeholders in this industry.

“Because our sole focus is on a relatively small, but crucially important sector of industry, we are in the ideal position to detect problems much earlier than any other organisation. To this end, we closely monitor our members to ensure product quality and full adherence to all relevant national standards. This is what clearly differentiates our member from non-SAPPMA members and why municipalities are increasingly insisting on membership to SAPPMA or our sister organisation, the Installation and Fabrication Plastics Pipe Association (IFPA), when they prepare tender and specification documents for new infrastructure installations or upgrades,” he says.

There is no shortcut to success. Skipping certain important steps, avoiding tests or using sub-standard materials ultimately and undoubtedly undermine the integrity of the final product and runs the risk of causing irrevocable damage to the industry.

“Trust is a very fragile thing. It takes years to build, seconds to break and forever to repair. It only takes a few pipe manufacturers who cheat rather than toe the line to produce sub-standard pipes that crack, bend or fail – thereby destroying the reputation and the future of an entire sector. We urge our industry to strengthen SAPPMA’s hand as we diligently work on building consumer confidence in an industry known for being responsible, ethical and conscious of quality,” Venter concludes.

For more information, visit www.sappma.co.za

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