

Home Inspections

by Carson Dunlop

The Story of Kitec® Plumbing

What is it?

- Kitec® is a brand of plastic piping used in hot and cold water supplies to plumbing fixtures, and in heating systems with boilers. It was made from 1995 to 2007.
- It is cross-linked polyethylene (PEX). It often has a thin layer of aluminum embedded between the inner and outer PEX walls. That type is called PEX-AL-PEX. The aluminum prevents oxygen moving through the pipe walls. Oxygen can lead to corrosion of boilers, for example.
- PEX piping, including Kitec®, was popular because it was faster (less expensive) to install than copper. PEX continues to be popular for both plumbing and heating systems in homes.

An Issue

- We should start by saying that as of January 2018, we have seen very few failure problems with this piping in our inspection area. A class action lawsuit was issued in 2011 against IPEX Inc., the manufacturer of Kitec®, alleging that the Kitec® System “may be subject to premature failure and otherwise may not perform in accordance with the reasonable expectation of users.”
- The lawsuit includes other IPEX products in addition to Kitec®. Many of these are solid wall PEX pipes with no layer of embedded aluminum. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no premature material failures with these pipes.
- IPEX and their insurance company settled, and set up a \$125 million fund to provide compensation for those with Kitec® failures.
- One alleged issue is with fittings that contain high levels of zinc, resulting in corrosion and weakness over time.
 - May result in leaks and water damage to the home
 - May also result in clogging and poor water pressure and flow
- We don't know if the issue is limited to areas with certain water chemistry, for example, or whether there were manufacturing issues with some of the product.
- The other issue is dark spots and/or blisters forming on the pipe.

Identifying Plumbing Involved in the Lawsuit

- It's usually blue on cold water piping and red or orange on hot water piping. It may also be black, white or grey. Heating system piping is most often orange.
- Piping named in the lawsuit includes the following brand names: Kitec, Plumbetter, IPEX AQUA, WarmRite, Kitec XPA, AmbioComfort, XPA, KERR Controls or Plomberie Améliorée.
- Fittings may also say Kitec or KT.



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Where to Look

- Near the hot water tank or near the boiler.
- Under kitchen sinks or bathroom vanities.
- There may be a notice on the electrical panel stating that Kitec® is used in the home, warning electricians not to ground the electrical system to it.
- You can also ask a professional home inspector or a plumber.

What if you have piping named in the lawsuit?

- Register with the class action website as a precautionary measure. If you have a problem, you may be reimbursed, in full or in part.
 - www.kitecsettlement.com
 - You have until 2020 to register
- Our best advice is to do what the class action website advises:
- File a claim as a precaution.
- The website is not recommending replacing the pipe where there are no issues.
- Watch for white corrosion on brass fittings. Contact a plumber if you see any discoloration, or notice a drop in water pressure. Hot water piping is more vulnerable than cold.
- Watch for black spots or blisters on the pipe, particularly near the water heater.
- Reminder: We have seen very few problems.
- Note: Homes with a pump that constantly recirculates hot water may be more prone to problems.
- We recommend tempering valves (mixing valves) on hot water systems to control the hot water temperature.



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Images of Kitec® plumbing from www.kitecsettlement.com



Home Inspection

Education

Report Writing Tools

To book an inspection, call 800-268-7070 or go to www.carsondunlop.com