

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 and we have seen it installed as late as 2012.
- 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 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. We have seen 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. Claims were accepted up to January 2020.
- 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 that was named in the lawsuit?

- We do not recommend replacing the pipe where there are no issues.
- Watch for white corrosion on brass fittings. Contact a plumber if you see any discolouration, 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

