

Position Paper: CSST

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The Polk County Fire Chiefs Association (PCFC) offers the following position on Corrugated Stainless Steel Tubing, commonly known as CSST gas piping:

The Polk County Fire Chiefs Association has serious concerns regarding CSST used as gas piping for many homes built in Iowa since the late 1990s. CSST is a flexible yellow pipe that can often be seen in a home's basement or in the unfinished ceiling area above the basement. CSST is safe and effective in day to day use, however; our concern is that there have been several cases where a lightning strike has occurred and the CSST has failed resulting in a hole in the CSST piping. In several cases, a subsequent gas-fed fire has occurred often resulting in significant damage to the structure.

There have been several fires attributed to CSST in Polk County. Since the PCFC has been keeping statistics on this issue in 2011, we have reported 31 home fires or uncontrolled gas leaks in our county attributed to CSST.

The issue is not unique to our State. There have been or are pending class action suits in other states regarding the safety of CSST and there have been several individual law suits involving CSST. The CSST industry has been successful in defending many law suits, however; the fact remains that a home was damaged by fire when the CSST failed following a lightning strike. This product has been used widely in Iowa and there are thousands of homes in Iowa believed to be equipped with literally tens of thousands of feet of CSST.

The PCFC wants to assure that homeowners are aware of the issue and that the PCFC has made an effort to work with CSST manufacturers to inform the public about the dangers of CSST and lightning strikes. A Public Service Announcement was created and aired in our state. Additionally, there is a web site where one can learn more about the safety and reported solutions to the issue with contact information regarding the manufacturers of CSST¹.

The CSST industry has made an effort to calm the concern by comparing CSST to the traditional black pipe used for gas installation. According to their data, CSST is far safer than black pipe. The concern of the PCFC is that the comparison being used does not match the experience of the PCFC or the experience of the Iowa Association of Professional Fire Chiefs and may erroneously negate the concern of CSST safety. A survey of Iowa Fire Chiefs at an annual conference found that none of the Chiefs present had in their career ever identified a single fire caused by the traditional black pipe failing. This survey included chiefs with experience in several states and including a representative from the National Fire Protection Association. With over 725 years of

collective experience, not one of those in attendance had ever had a fire involving black gas piping yet there have been more than 31 CSST fires/leaks in Iowa since 2011. We feel the reference misrepresents the safety of CSST and misleads the public to believe that their homes are less safe with black gas piping than with CSST. This is not consistent with our experience.

The CSST industry recommends that CSST be properly bonded. Bonding is a “grounding” process which is an effort to prevent the arcing of CSST if there is a lightning strike. Bonding should be completed by an electrician familiar with CSST and the bonding requirements set forth by the manufacturers. The PCFC supports this effort and to our knowledge, none of the CSST fires in our county have been homes where the CSST was properly bonded, however; we have heard anecdotal evidence of fires occurring even in homes where the CSST was properly bonded.

New CSST products have been introduced that are reported to be safer and address the issue of lightning strikes. The consumer should make an informed decision when choosing gas piping for their home. Those homeowners who already have CSST should have all of the facts about the problem and possible solutions.

We remain concerned about the potential hazards of yellow CSST during lightning storms. We encourage all home owners to check their homes for the presence of yellow CSST. If yellow CSST is present in your home, we encourage homeowners to contact an electrician that is familiar with CSST and the bonding requirements to assure that the yellow CSST is properly bonded.

1. <http://www.csstsafety.com/>

www.pcfca.com