



Copper is Still the Professionals' Choice

Think copper: think reliability, appearance and versatility

Research recently commissioned by the UK Copper Board has confirmed that copper continues to be the dominant material for heating and plumbing pipes in domestic installations.

The findings were overwhelmingly supportive of the key role copper still plays in today's plumbing practices.

The research involved focus groups of professional installers across the country and various age groups - from students starting out at 18 to those with years of experience at 55. The groups also included plumbers from a range of professional backgrounds, from large firms to one-man businesses.

Advantages for Younger Installers

Young plumbers regard copper as the future. Copper scores well with the younger installers who pick out the advantages of:

- ◆ aesthetics: copper looks neater and can be painted
- ◆ durability: copper is known to last for decades
- ◆ value for money: copper pipe and especially fittings are cheaper

and above all

- ◆ reliability: copper's proven track record

Advantages for Established Installers

The older plumbers show a similar consistency for preferring copper and are more specific, stressing:

- ◆ the professional appearance and neatness of copper tubing which does not sag like plastics
- ◆ copper is particularly good for visible work and gas installations
- ◆ its ability to withstand very high temperatures
- ◆ relative efficiency at heat transfer
- ◆ value for money
- ◆ proven longevity
- ◆ copper's versatility and the range of fittings offered: copper can be used in any installation
- ◆ track record for reliability and cosmetic quality

It has to be Copper

The majority of plumbers who were interviewed preferred using copper as it creates a professional installation, offering both pride in their work and peace of mind. One interviewee pointed out that using copper ensured he retains a professional image to his customers as well as helping his business grow.

"It's your name, you're better off putting more time into a job to avoid call backs, which keeps your schedule straight and could lead to recommendations."

Copper and plastics represent the main domestic pipework alternatives that installers consider and, for both age groups, copper is the dominant material, representing 88% of the pipework installed by those plumbers interviewed.

Additional advantages are that copper is familiar, traditional, and more available and reliable than substitutes - principally plastics. Versatility was identified by one interviewee as a benefit of using copper:

"Any job is suitable for copper...you can use it for everything."

Durability was another key advantage:

"Copper has a proven record, it's tried and tested and it's too early to say that for plastic."

It also looks better, particularly when the pipework is exposed, and does not have any of the DIY connotations that are associated with most alternatives such as plastics.

The Skill-Factor

This leads to a major concern expressed by many of the interviewees - that plastics are threatening the plumbing trade by de-skilling the installer. Plumbers recognise that copper's strong position in the market helps to safeguard the professionalism of plumbing as a trade. Participants also allied the future of the plumbing profession to the long-term sustainability of copper in the industry. This is primarily because they see plastics as carrying a stigma attached to them, due to strong associations with DIY and "cowboy" plumbers. Plastics systems emerged as copper's main rival, although steel was also

mentioned by some plumbers. However, steel was primarily specified on commercial installations.

Flame-Free Jointing Techniques

New copper flame-free technologies have a growing role in plumbing practices. Push-fit fittings are the technology with which the greater number of installers are familiar, and these were identified as a particularly useful option for ease and speed of installation. Press fittings were considered most appropriate for commercial or industrial applications.



The Professionals' Choice

The research found that overall, plumbers are committed to using copper in their installations as its high quality and durability provide them with job satisfaction and a sense of professional pride. Copper therefore convincingly remains the professional installer's choice. As one interviewee pointed out: "I bet we all use copper in our own homes."

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