



A material difference

There is a big difference between a WRAS approved product and a product using WRAS-approved materials, warns **Arthur Reader**

It is easy to think that a product is “approved” if it carries the mark or logo of a standards authority. Surely we can take for granted that a responsible manufacturer would not use the logo if they had not applied for the standard?

But we need to think carefully, because there is scope for confusion and misunderstanding.

The main problem arises with products made from approved materials. If the material is approved, then the product will be fine to install won’t it? Well, not necessarily.

Let’s take a look at WRAS. Its purpose is to promote and to facilitate compliance with the UK’s Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations and Scottish Water Byelaws.

In order to do this, WRAS has separate approval schemes for materials and products. It generally follows that approved products are made from approved materials. But it does not follow that a product will meet WRAS product approval just by being manufactured from approved materials, which indicate only a lack of taste or smell contamination.

This is a crucial distinction, as only by installing WRAS Approved Products can you be sure that you are in full compliance with reg.4 of The Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999, which ensures the mechanical performance of the system – and many specifiers, residential building developers and owners accordingly insist on WRAS approved products.

Failure to declare (and prove) such compliance leaves an installing client with liability for a potentially significant fine and the cost of replacing non-compliant items. Until this work is complete, the mains water supply will not be connected.

This is not a hypothetical situation. I know of a recent contract where the water undertaker

refused acceptance because a contractor had used non-conforming products. In the end the contractor had to carry out a costly refit before acceptance was granted.

You may be thinking this could not possibly happen on your site.

I recommend that people go on the WRAS website and check the approval status of the products they use.

This is a worthwhile exercise as it will probably be surprising how few “WRAS approved” items carry full product accreditation.

For example, there is only one PPR pipe system with full WRAS Approved Product status, despite there being several such systems on the market.

Part of the reason this “trap for the unwary” exists is that clients, specifiers and consultants talk too loosely about “WRAS approval”. They need to start being much more precise and ask for full WRAS-approved products whenever appropriate.

Manufacturers need to play their part, too. We’ve seen that material approval is not enough and it is no good saying “WRAS approved” in marketing messages, if this disguises the fact the product does not have full WRAS Product Approval.

In the future, WRAS could help the situation by introducing a logo that indicates the product is “fully compliant” and has both WRAS material approval and WRAS product approval. This would make it crystal clear to specifiers, installers and water undertakers that an installation meets the requirements of regulations.

As a certified continuing professional development presenter I am including this message whenever the opportunity arises. It is surprising how many engineers respond that they are unaware of this situation.

You have been warned!