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## Frisco bans pipes used in new homes

### Risk of fire cited with tubing for gas; industry calls product safe

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By STELLA M. CHÁVEZ / The Dallas Morning News

FRISCO – The city of Frisco has banned the use of a natural gas piping system commonly used in new home construction, citing concerns that it leads to fires when lightning strikes a structure.

The product, known as flexible corrugated stainless steel tubing, will no longer be allowed in new home construction effective immediately. The City Council approved the ban Tuesday night after studying a city-commissioned report that detailed deficiencies in the piping material.

Industry representatives say the city's study is flawed and pledge to file a lawsuit if the ban is not reversed.

The product has been widely used in North Texas in recent years. Frisco officials on Tuesday had no recommendations for homeowners whose homes might contain the material. They said the city is preparing a packet of information to provide to residents who already have the product or who may have concerns.

The city's study states that when lightning strikes a house with the corrugated piping, the pipes can expand and then explode, causing a fire.

Industry representatives say their product, commonly known as CSST, is safe and has been used nationwide for



years. They add that Frisco is the first city to impose such a ban.

"The product has never ever been prohibited by a city because of a fear of lightning strikes," said Arthur Anderson, the attorney representing Gastite, one of the product manufacturers.

Gastite officials say the problem is not their product but how the material is installed. They recommend that the city require that homes be equipped with a lightning protection system.

Jim Anderson, vice president of construction for Gehan Homes, which has built two communities in Frisco, called the city's decision disappointing and surprising. The product has been widely used for years and is safer than the previous technology of black steel natural gas piping, he said.

"It's tremendously stronger," he said.

The city began studying the issue last year after fire officials noted that in at least six fires in the last two years the point of origin could be linked to the flexible steel piping. In November, the manufacturers temporarily agreed to stop selling the product in Frisco to give the city time to study the issue.

Fire Marshal Don Fernandez said the city determined that lightning strikes on homes that had black steel piping did not cause fires. Gas leaks did occur, as they had with the flexible tubing, he said.

Council members unanimously approved the ban, saying they trusted the city study's findings and Fire Chief Mack Borchardt's recommendation that the material be banned.

Corrugated steel pipes have been in use since the late 1980s. Six manufacturers nationwide sell the product, said Dan Roberts, manager of applications engineering for Gastite.

Mr. Anderson of Gehan Homes said one of the advantages of using flexible steel is that it can be pressurized with up to 60 pounds of gas per square inch, whereas black steel can handle only up to 20 pounds per square inch. He also said black piping has a greater chance of leaking gas than flexible piping because of how it is "threaded" together.

James Stinebaugh, general manager of D&M Plumbing, said plumbing contractors prefer to use corrugated stainless steel over black steel piping because it's easier and quicker to install.

"We like to use CSST because we can often do five or six tract homes a day," he said.

Mr. Stinebaugh said the ban would force him to find a crew that could install the black steel pipes, but he did not think it would cause him to lose any contracts. He described it as an "inconvenience."

Mr. Anderson said changing to another material would increase home

costs.

"I'm very surprised that Frisco opted to ban the material," he said. "The alternative is going back to black pipe, which is very old technology. The corrugated piping system is an enhancement. It's much easier to install, it's much faster, and in my opinion, tremendously safer in the long term and short term."

That the corrugated material is used nationwide does not mean Frisco should continue to allow it, council members said.




"What I looked at was the end result. The fires originated from the pipes, and that to me was one of the deciding factors," council member Maher Maso said.

Said Mayor Mike Simpson: "We felt it was the right thing to do. We are obviously concerned about the safety of our residents."

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