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issues&trends commentary

SMaRT technologies

The future of infrastructure should be safe, certified, and environmentally friendly

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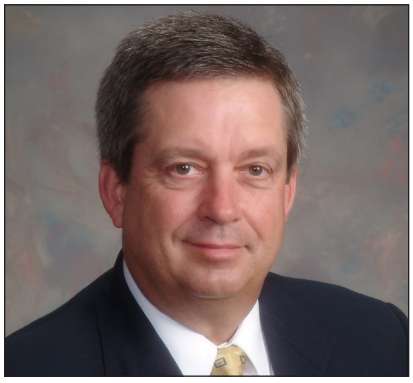

Gregg Horn *is the President of the Ductile Iron Pipe Research Association.*

With trillions of dollars needed to repair America's aged and crumbling infrastructure, national and local leaders must separate environmentally responsible products from "greenwashers" pushing unsustainable materials that can be and often are harmful to our health and communities.

Fortunately, there's now a "SMaRT" way to do that. SMaRT – for Sustainable Materials Rating Technology – is a global product standard and label that is certified by an independent third party. It's the new "LEED for products," working to eliminate market confusion and provide customers confidence in their sustainability decisions.

Hundreds of products have already been SMaRT certified, including Knoll furniture, AkzoNobel paints and coatings, Eaton electrical products, Forbo flooring, Philips lighting, Milliken Carpet, the National Clay Pipe Institute member companies, and the Ductile Iron Pipe Research Association (DIPRA) member companies' ductile iron pipe.

"Too often, cities make choices primarily on initial — and often misleading — costs, without assessing the costs over a product's life cycle or long-term health and environmental ramifications."

As government decision makers select new materials to rebuild roads, bridges and especially America's water systems, they can rely on the SMaRT certification to identify for the public and government agencies what is exactly in a product.

Too often, cities make choices primarily on initial — and often misleading — costs, without assessing the costs over a product's life cycle or long-term health and environmental ramifications. Investing in long-term, sustainable materials not only saves consumers and businesses money, it also spurs green innovation.

There are many certifications for sustainable materials, which makes it difficult to understand how products are environmentally friendly. But SMaRT stands out for its transparency and independent validation.

Led by the Institute for Market Transformation to Sustainability (MTS), SMaRT evaluates a product over its supply chain and life cycle, including reuse. Products must have multiple environmental, social and economic benefits over their supply chain in order to achieve a sustainable, sustainable silver, sustainable gold or sustainable platinum rating.

The goal of any sustainable product standard, label, and Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) is to provide verified, comparable and relevant information about a product's environmental impact across its life cycle. Yet, many standards, labels, and EPD's can be confusing and often mislead consumers. After 17 years of standardization and six approval votes involving thousands of professionals, SMaRT certified products and EPDs are recognized as a leading standard by the LEED Green Building Standard. SMaRT has also been adopted for credit by the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand Green Building Councils for LEED and Green Star.

Moreover, SMaRT products and LEED green buildings were documented as more profitable, less risky, and preferred by investors on Wall Street, as announced in 2009 at the New York Stock Exchange.

When it comes to protecting our water, food and air, the public expects human health to be taken seriously. SMaRT certification guides public agencies towards responsible and informed purchasing decisions, especially for those products that will have a health and environmental impact for generations.

Recognizing the importance of clean and safe water, SMaRT certifications are now being promoted throughout the water and wastewater piping industry. Made from ferric scrap, ductile iron pipe has nearly 95 percent recycled content and is 100 percent recyclable in return. It also has an average design service life of 100 years. And its larger than nominal inside diameter minimizes pumping costs, saving ratepayers money, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

It's smart to repair infrastructure before it breaks and it's smart to use materials that last and are recyclable and safe. When it comes to our nation's big infrastructure challenges, not going SMaRT would be pretty dumb.

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