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CUSTOMER CONNECTION

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AD PROMPTS SMALL-TOWN ACTIVISM FOR BETTER PIPE

JM Eagle's full-page advertisement in several daily newspapers announcing its 50-year warranty struck the heart of at least one citizen fed up with iron-pipe leaks in his community.

Running in the Norfolk (Va.) Pilot, the ad caught the attention of Clyde Vaughan, a long-time resident of the small town of Courtland, Va., which lies about 45 miles west of Norfolk. The town, according to Vaughan, has experienced 18 leaks in the last three years, 12 in front of his house, and Vaughan has had enough.

"I'd never heard of the company before," says Vaughan of JM Eagle. "It's probably a good idea the ad was published."

Courtland, Va., population 1,500, started bringing potable water to its residents in 1956, Vaughan says, installing black iron pipe in 1964. Vaughan says the city selected black iron because of limited funds.

www.eHow.com, a how-to Web site that offers home-improvement tips, says black iron was common in those times, but is rarely, if ever, used anymore to transport water into a home because it frequently suffers breaks at joints and corrodes easily.

Corrosion, in fact, is a problem with all types of iron pipe. It was recently cited as the leading cause of a 2009 rash of cast-iron breaks that numbered in the hundreds by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

Ductile iron fares poorly, too. Pitting, galvanic reaction, microbiological, electrolyte and stray current are the five leading factors of external corrosion in that form of the product, which is still used in many jurisdictions. The Ductile Iron Pipe Research Association acknowledges that corrosion shortens the life of its product.

Compared to plastic pipe, neither stands up. The National Research Council of Canada reported that the break rates per 100 km for cast iron pipe, ductile iron pipe and PVC pipe are 35.9, 9.5 and 0.7, respectively.

The Environmental Protection Agency adds that replacing the pipe is a small part of the expense incurred when a pipe breaks. Loss of water, contamination, property loss, water damage, service interruptions and traffic delays add 30 to 40 percent to already high repair costs.

These facts are vindication to concerned citizens like Vaughan, who can't park his car in front of his house or seed his lawn due to the flooding of rusty water from Courtland's corroded pipes. The retired laboratory analyst plans to take news of JM Eagle's 50-year warranty, as well as the benefits of plastic pipe, to his city council and encourage members to make a better choice when they replace the deteriorating cast iron. He's also sending photos of the destruction to his front yard to the state water board.

"I'm just tired of it," he says.