

Chapter 9

PE Pipe Joining Procedures

Introduction

An integral part of any pipe system is the method used to join the system components. Proper engineering design of a system will take into consideration the type and effectiveness of the techniques used to join the piping components and appurtenances, as well as the durability of the resulting joints. The integrity and versatility of the joining techniques used for PE pipe allow the designer to take advantage of the performance benefits of PE in a wide variety of applications.

General Provisions

PE pipe or fittings are joined to each other by heat fusion or with mechanical fittings. PE pipe may be joined to other pipe materials by means of compression fittings, flanges, or other qualified types of manufactured transition fittings. There are many types and styles of fittings available from which the user may choose. Each offers its particular advantages and limitations for each joining situation the user may encounter. Contact with the various manufacturers is advisable for guidance in proper applications and styles available for joining as described in this document. The joining methods discussed in this chapter cover both large and small diameter pipe. Large diameter PE pipe is considered to be sizes 3" IPS (3.500" OD, Iron Pipe Size) and larger. All individuals involved in the joining PE pipe systems, whether it be using the typical heat fusion methods or employing mechanical connections, should be fully trained and qualified in accordance with applicable codes and standards and/or as recommended by the pipe or fitting manufacturer. Those assigned to making joints in PE pipe for gas applications must meet the additional requirement of compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation Pipeline Safety Regulations(10). The equipment used in the process of making heat fused joints must be designed to operate for the selected pipe and fusion procedures. Additionally, the equipment should be well maintained and capable of operating to specification.

Thermal Heat Fusion Methods

There are three types of conventional heat fusion joints currently used in the industry; Butt, Saddle, and Socket Fusion. Additionally, electrofusion (EF) joining is available with special EF couplings and saddle fittings.

The principle of heat fusion is to heat two surfaces to a designated temperature, then fuse them together by application of a sufficient force. This force causes the melted materials to flow and mix, thereby resulting in fusion. When fused according to the pipe and/or fitting manufacturers' procedures, the joint area becomes as strong as, or stronger than, the pipe itself in both tensile and pressure properties and properly fused joints are absolutely leak proof. As soon as the joint cools to near ambient temperature, it is ready for handling. The following sections of this chapter provide a general procedural guideline for each of these heat fusion methods.

Butt Fusion

The most widely used method for joining individual lengths of PE pipe and pipe to PE fittings is by heat fusion of the pipe butt ends as illustrated in Figure 1. This technique produces a permanent, economical and flow-efficient connection. Quality butt fusion joints are produced by using trained operators and quality butt fusion machines in good condition.

The butt fusion machine should be capable of:

- Aligning the pipe ends
- Clamping the pipes
- Facing the pipe ends parallel and square to the centerline
- Heating the pipe ends
- Applying the proper fusion force

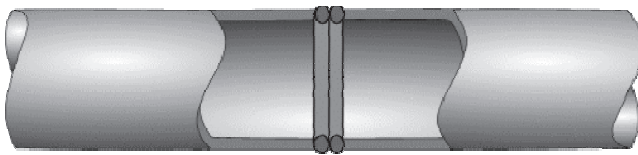


Figure 1 A Standard Butt Fusion Joint

The six steps involved in making a butt fused joint are:

1. Clean, clamp and align the pipe ends to be joined
2. Face the pipe ends to establish clean, parallel surfaces, perpendicular to the center line
3. Align the pipe ends
4. Melt the pipe interfaces
5. Join the two pipe ends together by applying the proper fusion force
6. Hold under pressure until the joint is cool

Butt Fusion of PE Pipe Products with Different Wall Thicknesses

PE pipes of the same outside diameter but having different specified wall thicknesses, that is, different DR designations, may be butt fused to each other under special conditions. Since this represents a special situation, it is subject to limitations. Therefore, the user is advised to consult with the pipe manufacturer to determine if the special procedures can be applied to the pipe components involved in the particular installation in question. If so, a written copy of the applicable assembly recommendations should be obtained.

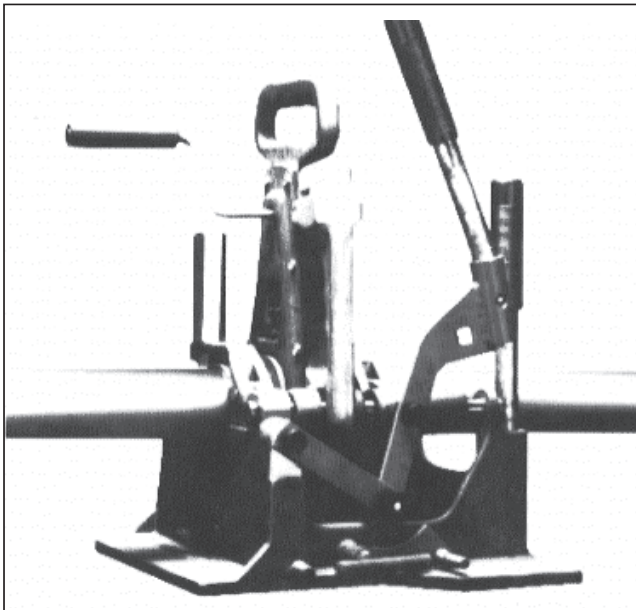


Figure 2 Typical Butt Fusion Machine for Smaller Diameter Pipe
(Butt Fusion machines are available to fuse pipe up to 65 inches in diameter)

Most pipe manufacturers have detailed parameters and procedures to follow. The majority of them helped develop and have approved the PPI Technical Report TR-33 for the generic butt fusion joining procedure for PE pipe⁽¹⁵⁾ and ASTM F 2620.

Optional Bead Removal

In some pipe systems, engineers may elect to remove the inner or outer bead of the joint. External, or both beads are removed with run-around planing tools, which are forced into the bead, then drawn around the pipe. Power planers may also be used, but care must be taken not to cut into the pipe's outside surface.

It is uncommon to remove internal beads, as they have little or no effect on flow, and removal is time-consuming. Internal beads may be removed from pipes after each fusion with a cutter fitted to a long pole. Since the fusion must be completely cooled before bead removal, assembly time is increased slightly.

Saddle/Conventional Fusion

The conventional technique to join a saddle to the side of a pipe, illustrated in Figure 3, consists of simultaneously heating both the external surface of the pipe and the matching surface of the “saddle” type fitting with concave and convex shaped heating tools until both surfaces reach proper fusion temperature. This may be accomplished by using a saddle fusion machine that has been designed for this purpose.

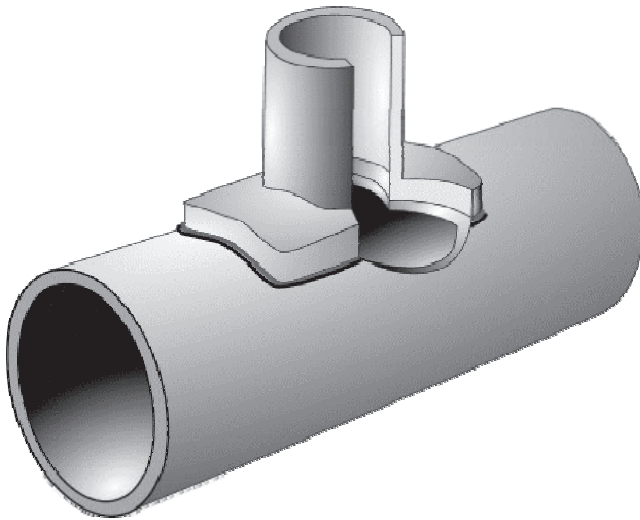


Figure 3 Standard Saddle Fusion Joint

Saddle fusion using a properly designed machine, provides the operator better alignment and force control, which is very important to fusion joint quality. The Plastics Pipe Institute recommends that saddle fusion joints be made only with a mechanical assist tool unless hand fusion is expressly allowed by the pipe and/or fitting manufacturer.⁽¹⁶⁾

There are eight basic sequential steps that are normally used to create a saddle fusion joint:

1. Clean the pipe surface area where the saddle fitting is to be located
2. Install the appropriate size heater saddle adapters

3. Install the saddle fusion machine on the pipe
4. Prepare the surfaces of the pipe and fitting in accordance with the recommended procedures
5. Align the parts
6. Heat both the pipe and the saddle fitting
7. Press and hold the parts together
8. Cool the joint and remove the fusion machine

Most pipe manufacturers have detailed parameters and procedures to follow. The majority of them helped develop and have approved the PPI Technical Report TR-41 for the generic saddle fusion joining procedure for PE pipe⁽¹⁶⁾ and ASTM 2620.

Socket Fusion

This technique consists of simultaneously heating both the external surface of the pipe end and the internal surface of the socket fitting until the material reaches the recommended fusion temperature, inspecting the melt pattern, inserting the pipe end into the socket, and holding it in place until the joint cools. Figure 4 illustrates a typical socket fusion joint. Mechanical equipment is available to hold both the pipe and the fitting and should be used for sizes larger than 2" CTS to help attain the increased force required and to assist in alignment. Most pipe manufacturers have detailed written procedures to follow. The majority refer to ASTM F 2620.

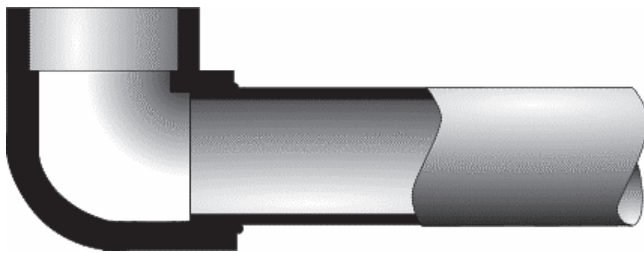


Figure 4 Standard Socket Fusion Joint

Follow these general steps when performing socket fusion:

1. Thoroughly clean the end of the pipe and the matching inside surface of the fitting
2. Square and prepare the pipe end
3. Heat the parts

4. Join the parts
5. Allow to cool

Equipment Selection

Select the proper size tool faces and heat the tools to the fusion temperature recommended for the material to be joined. For many years, socket fusion tools were manufactured without benefit of any industry standardization. As a result, variances of heater and socket depths and diameters, as well as depth gauges, do exist. More recently, ASTM F1056⁽⁷⁾ was written, establishing standard dimensions for these tools. Therefore, mixing various manufacturers' heating tools or depth gauges is not recommended unless the tools are marked "F1056," indicating compliance with the ASTM specification and, thereby, consistency of tooling sizes.

Square and Prepare Pipe

Cut the end of the pipe square. Chamfer the pipe end for sizes 1¼"-inch diameter and larger. (Chamfering of smaller pipe sizes is acceptable and sometimes specified in the instructions.) Remove scraps, burrs, shavings, oil, or dirt from the surfaces to be joined. Clamp the cold ring on the pipe at the proper position, using the integral depth gauge pins or a separate (thimble type) depth gauge. The cold ring will assist in re- rounding the pipe and provide a stopping point for proper insertion of the pipe into the heating tool and coupling during the fusion process.

Heating

Check the heater temperature. Periodically verify the proper surface temperature using a pyrometer or other surface temperature measuring device. If temperature indicating markers are used, do not use them on a surface that will come in contact with the pipe or fitting. Bring the hot clean tool faces into contact with the outside surface of the end of the pipe and with the inside surface of the socket fitting, in accordance with pipe and fitting manufacturers' instructions.

Joining

Simultaneously remove the pipe and fitting from the tool using a quick "snap" action. Inspect the melt pattern for uniformity and immediately insert the pipe squarely and fully into the socket of the fitting until the fitting contacts the cold ring. Do not twist the pipe or fitting during or after the insertion, as is the practice with some joining methods for other pipe materials.

Cooling

Hold or block the pipe in place so that the pipe cannot come out of the joint while the mating surfaces are cooling. These cooling times are listed in the pipe or fitting manufacturer's instructions.

Electrofusion (EF)

This technique of heat fusion joining is somewhat different from the conventional fusion joining thus far described. The main difference between conventional heat fusion and electrofusion is the method by which the heat is applied. In conventional heat fusion joining, a heating tool is used to heat the pipe and fitting surfaces. The electrofusion joint is heated internally, either by a conductor at the interface of the joint or, as in one design, by a conductive polymer. Heat is created as an electric current is applied to the conductive material in the fitting. Figure 5 illustrates a typical electrofusion joint. PE pipe to pipe connections made using the electrofusion process require the use of electrofusion couplings.

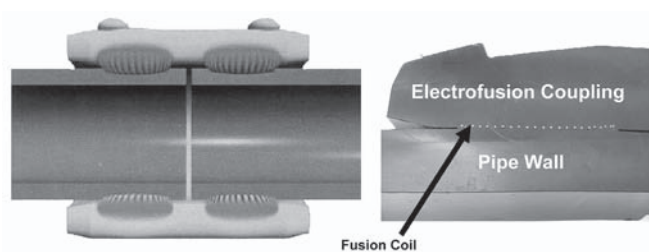


Figure 5 Typical Electrofusion Joint

General steps to be followed when performing electrofusion joining are:

1. Prepare the pipe (scrape, clean)
2. Mark the pipe
3. Align and restrain pipe and fitting per manufacturer's recommendations
4. Apply the electric current
5. Cool and remove the clamps
6. Document the fusion process

Prepare the Pipe (Clean and Scrape)

Assure the pipe ends are cut square when joining using electrofusion couplings. The fusion area must be clean from dirt or contaminants. This may require the use of water or 90% isopropyl alcohol (NO ADDITIVES OR NOT DENATURED). Next,

the pipe surface in the fusion must be scraped, that is material must be removed to expose clean virgin material. This may be achieved by various special purpose tools available from the fitting manufacturer.

Mark the Pipe

Mark the pipe for stab depth of couplings or the proper fusion location of saddles. (Caution should be taken to assure that a non-petroleum marker is used.)

Align and Restrain Pipe or Fitting Per the Manufacturer's Recommendations

Align and restrain fitting to pipe per manufacturer's recommendations. Place the pipe(s) and fitting in the clamping fixture to prevent movement of the pipe(s) or fitting. Give special attention to proper positioning of the fitting on the prepared pipe surfaces. Large pipe diameters may need re-rounding prior to the electrofusion process.

Apply Electric Current

Connect the electrofusion control box to the fitting and to the power source (see Figure 6). Apply electric current to the fitting as specified in the manufacturer's instructions. Read the barcode which is supplied with the electrofusion fitting. If the control does not do so automatically, turn off the current when the proper time has elapsed to heat the joint properly.



Figure 6 Typical Electrofusion Control Box and Leads with Clamps and Fittings

Cool Joint and Remove Clamps

Allow the joint to cool for the recommended time. If using clamps, premature removal from the clamps and any strain on a joint that has not fully cooled can be detrimental to joint performance.

Consult the fitting manufacturer for detailed parameters and procedures.

Documenting fusion

The Electrofusion control box that applies current to the fitting also controls and monitors the critical parameters of fusion, (time, temperature, & pressure). The control box is a micro-processor capable of storing the specific fusion data for each joint. This information can be downloaded to a computer for documentation and inspection of the days work.

Heat Fusion Joining of Unlike PE Pipe and Fittings

Research has indicated that PE pipe and fittings made from unlike resins can be heat-fused together to make satisfactory joints. Some gas companies have been heat-fusion joining unlike PEs for many years with success. Guidelines for heat fusion of unlike materials are outlined in TN 13, issued by the Plastics Pipe Institute. Refer to Plastics Pipe Institute Technical Reports TR-33 and TR-41, ASTM F 2620 and the pipe and fitting manufacturers for specific procedures.

As mentioned earlier, fusion joints, whether they involve the conventional butt, socket or saddle heat fusion assembly procedures or the electrofusion procedure, should only be made by personnel fully trained and qualified in those procedures. The equipment used shall be designed to operate for the selected pipe and fusion procedures. The equipment should be well maintained and capable of operating to specification. In addition, it is important that only the specified or recommended joining procedures be followed at all times during assembly operations.

Mechanical Connections

As in the heat fusion methods, many types of mechanical connection styles and methods are available. This section is a general description of these types of fittings.

The Plastics Pipe Institute recommends that the user be well informed about the performance attributes of the particular mechanical connector being utilized. Fitting selection is important to the performance of a piping system. Product performance and application information should be available from the fitting manufacturer to assist in the selection process as well as instructions for use and performance limits, if any. Additional information for these types of products is also contained in a variety of specifications such as ASTM F1924, F1973, and AWWA C219.

PE pipe, conduit and fittings are available in outside diameter controlled Iron Pipe Sizes (IPS), Ductile Iron Pipe Sizes (DIPS), Copper Tubing Sizes (CTS) and Metric Sizes. There are also some inside diameter controlled pipe sizes (SIDR-PR). Before selecting mechanical fittings, establish which of the available piping system sizes and types are being installed to ensure proper fit and function. The pipe manufacturer can provide dimensional information, and the fitting manufacturer can advise on the correct fitting selection for the application.

Mechanical Compression Couplings for Small Diameter Pipes

This style of fitting comes in many forms and materials. The components, as depicted in Figure 7, are generally a body; a threaded compression nut; an elastomer seal ring or O-ring; a stiffener; and, with some, a grip ring. The seal and grip rings, when compressed, grip the outside of the pipe, effecting a pressure-tight seal and, in most designs, providing pullout resistance which exceeds the yield strength of the PE pipe. It is important that the inside of the pipe wall be supported by the stiffener under the seal ring and under the gripping ring (if incorporated in the design), to avoid deflection of the pipe. A lack of this support could result in a loss of the seal or the gripping of the pipe for pullout resistance. This fitting style is normally used in service lines for gas or water pipe 2" IPS and smaller. It is also important to consider that three categories of this type of joining device are available. One type provides a seal only, a second provides a seal and some restraint from pullout, and a third provides a seal plus full pipe restraint against pullout.

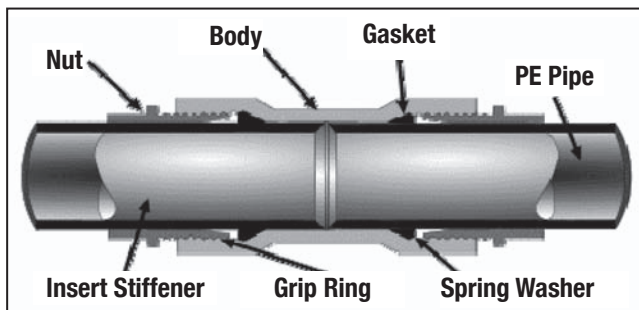


Figure 7 Typical Compression Nut Type Mechanical Coupling for Joining PE Pipe to PE Pipe

Stab Type Mechanical Fittings

Here again many styles are available. The design concept, as illustrated in Figure 8, is similar in most styles. Internally there are specially designed components including an elastomer seal, such as an "O" ring, and a gripping device to effect pressure sealing and pullout resistance capabilities. Self-contained stiffeners are included in this design. With this style fitting the operator prepares the pipe ends,