Forget the Bread

By Dale Walters, CGCS

Every once in awhile we all have an epiphany. A light bulb moment. A slap on the forehead - why didn’t I think of this idea sooner? An idea that we feel might be original, brilliant, astounding, revolutionizing and ultimately really useful to our industry and to others.

I recently had such a thought. In July I had a 3-inch pipe line that was leaking at a tee fitting. After valving off the area, I cut the pipe and waited for the line to drain, and I waited, pulled some weeds, waited, wrote a To-Do list, waited, then I used a sump pump to remove the draining water flow. The drainage flow continued into a second day. I wanted to use pipe cleaner and pvc cement for the replacement fittings. But with the continuous flow I had to wait until it ceased to make a dry repair.

In the past, I have used bread to block the flow but there were nearby sprinklers and I have seen them clog up from the bread. Then the heavens parted and an idea fell out of the sky. After all, I had plenty of time to think while waiting for the flow to stop. So, it was at this time that I came up with the idea of using water-soluble material to stop the flow and give me time to make a dry situation for the pvc cement.

For several years, I have been using acephate (Orthene) in a water-soluble bag. I thought about the timing it takes for the bag to break down and if I could use a similar material it would be enough time to make the repair. Using a water-soluble material would mean I would not need to be concerned about the pipe lines being clogged after the system is pressurized.

I located a distributor of water-soluble materials that are being used primarily in the medical field. After a visit with the distributor, I was given several types of product to play with. I ran several experiments in the shop to figure out which product would work best in the field.

Fortunately (and unfortunately) I had several irrigation leaks shortly after receiving the material. I had one 8-inch, one 6-inch, one 4-inch, one 3-inch, and two 2-inch pipe leaks. Instant field testing! In each case I was successful in using the water-soluble material to stop the flow and give me time to make the repair before the flow stopped.

The bruises on my forehead from my “Why Didn’t I Think Of This Sooner” experience faded, and in September, I applied for and received a provisional patent for the use of water-soluble material to stop a flow in a pipe line. Presently, I am seeking how to market the material so that others can benefit from the time-saving method of making pvc repairs.

Editor’s note: Dale submitted his innovation for irrigation repairs while he was still a superintendent at the Royal Palm C.C. in Naples. This isn’t a plug for a Lesco product, but it might be some day. For current contact information, see the inside cover. Good luck,

Dale!