

Many companies in the water treatment market sell connectors for various water appliances such as water heaters and washing machines. But Falcon Stainless, Inc., a company based out of Sun Valley, Calif., is the only company in the market that specializes in only corrugated stainless steel (CSS) connectors—and because the company offers a wide range of diameters and lengths and tailors them specifically to different clients, it has become one of the most successful connector companies in the market. Its connectors are made for applications ranging from water heaters and water softeners to toilets, faucets and icemakers.

By Clare Pierson

Falcon Stainless began operations in 1981 and has expanded its client base since then to include plumbing wholesalers, OEMs, homeowners, independent water treatment dealers, retail outlets and plumbers.

The Product

It is clear that Falcon Stainless prides itself on using stainless steel, rather than any other material, to make its products. Melanie Wolff, vice president of Falcon Stainless, said stainless steel allows for a faster and easier installation.

“With the flex connector, generally the plumbing is already there, and you just screw it onto the bypass, and you’re done,” she said. “So it really makes a much easier installation, besides the fact that stainless steel will not oxidize, will not corrode and will not get all funky and green like a copper flex might.”

In addition, Wolff said, stainless steel connectors can come in sizes in which copper connectors cannot be made, due to the flexibility of stainless steel.

The website advertises that its stainless

steel $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. Mega-Flow connector allows 17% more flow than copper connectors, 31% more flow than other CSS connectors and 134% more flow than braided polymer connectors.

“And that’s not our claim, it’s the claim of our dealers,” Wolff explained. “We’ve been told that they can save anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. And that translates into real dollars for the dealer. If they save an hour for every day on every installation, they can do more installations in a week.”

Stainless steel connectors are especially valuable in a place like California that is earthquake-prone, because even a small earthquake could crack a hard pipe made of copper, for instance. But if a customer does not live in an area with high seismic movement, why should they use a stainless steel connector? Wolff said that often the tank on which the connector is installed will be outside on top of concrete, and due to natural settling that will take place because of its weight, a hard pipe job inside the tank could crack easily.

Proprietary Products

The most unique aspect about Falcon Stainless is probably the sheer range of sizes, from $\frac{3}{8}$ - to 2-in., in which its connectors can be made. Another important characteristic of the West Coast company, however, is that it makes proprietary connectors that are specially designed and manufactured for water treatment dealers such as Culligan and Hague.

For example, Falcon Stainless makes a connector for Hague Quality Water that has

By focusing on customer service and proprietary manufacturing, Falcon Stainless aims to be as flexible as its connectors



A Company
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a special Hague 1¼-in. FIP nut that is 6mm longer in order to correctly fit a Hague Water max bypass. Falcon also makes a special connector for GE's Autotrol bypass.

"[Bypasses are] all different," Wolff said. "Some of them are tapered, some are straight, some have threads all the way down to the end, so we've made connectors to accommodate many of those particular differences between one and the other, as opposed to leaving it to a generic part to fit the bill."

Dealer Feedback

Of course, the people at Falcon Stainless love their products and will endorse them freely, but many dealers are also willing to defend Falcon's flex connector as their connector of choice. Ben Larson of Indianapolis Soft Water, who is a GE products dealer, said his company buys Falcon flex connectors to make installations faster and trouble-free.

"These connectors cut down on our install time by approximately 15 to 20%, which is critical to our bottom line," Larson said. "Flexible connectors are also appropriate for water softeners because they will flex under pressure, reducing the stress on the rigid pipes. This is especially true for a commercial installation because these machines put an enormous amount of stress on the plumbing, and the flexible connector will absorb some of the shock when a softener changes cycles."

Madelyn Shmidt, vice president of Long Island Clean Water in New York, agrees with Larson. "We buy Falcon flex connectors as they save time at installations. Our installers seem pleased with using them and we are happy with the overall results," Shmidt said.

As for the differences and preferences between copper and stainless steel connectors, Marty Satalino, president of Water Quality Plumbing and Serv-All Water Conditioning, said he still purchases both stainless steel and copper flex line.

"We use ¾-in. copper flex lines in our plumbing division because we can solder them onto copper tubing for water heater applications. In our water treatment division, we use 1 and 1½-in. to connect both residential and light commercial water softeners." But, Satalino added, "No copper flex line compares to stainless steel in these applications."

Shmidt said, "We use both flex connectors and copper. There are instances where one might be more preferable. It all depends on each particular situation and application."

Larson, however, only buys, sells and uses stainless steel connectors. He said, "We have not used copper or braided, but to my knowledge, stainless lasts longer, doesn't react with other metals and is more durable. We also like Falcon's products because they custom-make connectors that attach directly to all of the different brands of control valves we use. This eliminates an extra connection and cost."

All three of these dealers praised the friendliness and promptness of Falcon's customer service, which is all the company could ask for, according to Wolff.

She recently got an email from the chief engineer at Bradford White, a successful water heater company. According to Wolff, he said, "Once again I will spend the day without socks as you have knocked

them off with your customer service."

"That kind of thing shakes my tree and just makes me feel good," Wolff said. "We like helping people and we like providing them with a great product." *wqp*

About the Author

Clare Pierson is associate editor for *Water Quality Products*. She can be

reached at 847.391.1012, or by e-mail at cperson@sgcmail.com.

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