

Comparison of Closed Cell Elastomeric Insulation Products To Fibrous Insulation Products

This Technical Bulletin will focus on a comparison of the physical properties of closed cell elastomeric insulation products with those of fibrous insulation products for below ambient applications such as chilled water where moisture from condensation can be an issue. Elastomeric insulation products are an ideal choice for applications such as chilled water, Refrigeration, HVAC, domestic hot and cold water and other applications up to 220F service temperature.

The following chart highlights the physical properties of the elastomeric and fibrous insulation products. The properties listed are common to industry published literature or are taken from ASTM standards

Insulation Material	Units	Elastomeric	Fibrous w/ASJ	Fibrous w/o ASJ
Thermal (at 75°F mean)	k	<0.27	0.24	NA
Wvt	perm-in	<0.10	0.02	75
Flammability ASTM E 84 Rating	25/50	25/50 1" and below	25/50 1" and below	
Service Temperature Range		-297° to +220°F	0 to +850°F	

Table 1

RECOMMENDED WALL THICKNESS

Conditions - pipe size up to 1/2" IPS Ambient temp 80°F

	Fluid Temperature 35° - 49°		Fluid Temperature 50° - 70°	
Relative Humidity	Fibrous	Elastomeric	Fibrous	Elastomeric
50%	1"	1/2"	1/2"	1/2"
70%	1"	1/2"	1/2"	1/2"
90%	1-1/2"	1-3/8"	1-1/2"	1"

Conditions - pipe size up to 8" IPS Ambient temp 80°F

	Fluid Temperature 35° - 49°		Fluid Temperature 50° - 70°	
Relative Humidity	Fibrous	Elastomeric	Fibrous	Elastomeric
50%	1"	1/2"	1/2"	1/2"
70%	1"	1/2"	1/2"	1/2"
90%	2"	1-5/8"	1-1/2"	1-3/8"

COMPARISON CHART

	Closed Cell Elastomeric	Fibrous Products
Excellent thermal k	yes	yes
Excellent wvt without jacketing	yes	*
25/50 flammability rating	yes	yes
Available in white	yes	yes
Available with self seal closure	yes	yes
Closed Cell Structure	yes	no
Fiber Free	yes	no
Non-porous	yes	no
Mold Resistant	yes	**
Flexible	yes	no

* Fibrous products require a jacket

** Mold and mildew require two key elements, moisture and a nutrient source such as dirt. A material's resistance to moisture and dirt accumulation is a major factor in eliminating mold issues.



RBX Industries, Inc., 5221 ValleyPark Drive, Roanoke, VA 24109-3074
phone 800-765-6475 fax 800-656-9465

Differences in composition and structure, no jacket required

The key distinction between elastomeric and fibrous insulation products is fundamental in their composition and structure. Closed cell elastomeric insulation products are comprised of individual cells filled with gas. These non-connecting cells, resist moisture, compression and provide excellent thermal conductivity values. On indoor applications, no additional jacket or covering is necessary because of this closed cell structure. For outdoor applications with severe UV exposure, a protective coating is recommended to protect the product from the effects of UV. The elastomeric composition of the product creates the extreme flexibility and ease of installation of the product. The application temperature range of -297°F to 220°F allows it to be used on a wide range of applications well beyond chilled water.

Conversely, fibrous products are composed of spun fibers that create interconnecting air spaces which provide insulation qualities but creates a rigid product which must be jacketed to prevent moisture pickup. The integrity of the jacket is a key element to the fibrous insulation system and if it is punctured in any way, the insulation system may fail. Fibrous products are ideal for above ambient temperature systems where moisture from condensation is not a factor.

Excellent thermal conductivity

Table 1 highlights the fact that in regard to thermal properties, moisture vapor transmission and flammability properties, elastomeric and fibrous materials are very similar.

When comparing thermal k, one has to be reminded that copper has a thermal k of about 250. Most insulation products have a thermal k in the range of 0.23 – 0.30 and would all be considered excellent insulators. Other factors would play a more important role in the selection of an insulation material ie. maintaining the integrity of the system and the consequences if the jacket is punctured (for every 1% moisture pickup, the insulation loses 7 of its insulation value. Water is 15 times more conductive than typical insulation products). In addition, the ability of a material to resist compression / crushing (resulting in thickness loss) is also a key concern to maintaining the long term thermal properties of the insulation system.

Product offering can also play a role in thickness selection. RBX elastomeric products are offered in a wide range of ID and wall thicknesses. In addition, the ability to sleeve products to attain a specific thickness allows for greater latitude in product selection.

Inherent moisture vapor retarder

When comparing moisture vapor transmission values, it is important to note that materials with a wvt of 0.10 perms-in or less are considered to be moisture vapor retarders as defined by ASHRAE and ASTM. In the case of elastomeric products, this wvt value is achieved without the addition of a jacket. Whereas with fibrous products, a jacket is needed to achieve this and if the jacket is punctured or torn from mechanical abuse, the wvt value increases substantially such that the system may fail. In addition, this type of situation can result in the growth of mold and fungi on the material. Elimination of moisture is a key to the elimination of mold. Closed cell elastomeric foam products also resist dirt entrapment.

Wide product offering, non-fibrous, non-porous

Closed cell elastomeric materials are non-fibrous and non-porous. No special tools are necessary for their installation. This means that no particulates / contaminants are sent into the operating environment either during installation or service. They can be painted for aesthetics but are also available in white. Elastomeric materials are available with an easy-to-use self-seal closure system for quick, neat installation. Elastomeric pipe insulation is available in 3/8", 1/2", 3/4" and 1" wall thicknesses for up to 8" IPS size. Elastomeric material is also available in sheet and rolls up to 2" thickness.

Flexible closed cell elastomeric foams have been used for below ambient insulation applications for years and are the preferred product for this application. Fibrous material specifications are often slow to change, perpetuating themselves despite the availability of newer materials which offer many advantages. We will be glad to assist you in reviewing your specification requirements.

For more technical information, particularly on condensation control, please contact RBX Technical Services: Roger Schmidt or Bill Ronca at 800-782-2839 x6056.