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- **Bring Back the Plague**

IN OTHER NEWS

Are we under the right Ministry?

A few years ago some bright spark determined that plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying were just trades in the construction industry and as such the industry was moved from the control of the Ministry of Health to the then Minister of Building and Construction.

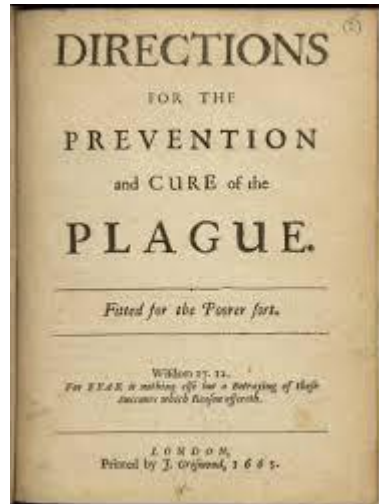
Yes we are part of construction, but look at it this way, builders build houses etc to keep people warm, dry and safe in major events such as earthquakes - electricians provide electricity to run the nice things in life and for heating and cooking.

Plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers provide drinking water, heating, gas and water for cooking and get rid of human waste. We provide the necessary items for good sanitation.

Here is a list of 15 diseases that can be stamped out by providing good sanitation:

- Anaemia, malnutrition
- Ascariasis (a type of

Bring Back the Plague



The Black Death arrived in Europe by sea in October 1347 when 12 Genoese trading ships docked at the Sicilian port of Messina after a long journey through the Black Sea. The people who gathered on the docks to greet the ships were met with a horrifying surprise: Most of the sailors aboard the ships were dead, and those who were still alive were gravely ill. They were overcome with fever, unable to keep food down and delirious from pain.

Strangest of all, they were covered in mysterious black boils that oozed blood and pus and this gave their illness its name: the “Black Death.” The Sicilian authorities hastily ordered the fleet of “death ships” out of the harbour, but it was too late. Over the next five years, the mysterious Black Death would kill more than 20 million people in Europe—almost one-third of the continent’s population.

You may well ask what's this has got to do with us - well last week at a meeting the discussions got around to how plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers are undervalued by both the Government and the public. One suggestion was we all pack our bags and go to Hawaii for a three week holiday and then see what condition the country is in upon our return - and then see if we are valued or not. A second person (showing their age) said "bring back the plague".

That got us thinking about the value of our industry and the direct link we as tradespeople play in the health and safety of the public, the value we place on ourselves and the value others place on our skills and knowledge.

There seems to be a perception by the public and government that practitioners in our industry are “ mere tradespeople”, and plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers overcharge for services. There appears to be very little value placed on our services and the risks we take. The public perception has set a glass ceiling for what they are prepared to pay for a tradesperson in our industry and we are forced to work to that limit.

intestinal worm infection)
• Campylobacteriosis
• Cholera
• Cyanobacteria toxins
• Dengue
• Hepatitis
• Japanese encephalitis (JE)
• Leptospirosis
• Malaria
• Ringworm or Tinea (a type of intestinal worm infection)
• Scabies
• Schistosomiasis
• Trachoma
• Typhoid and paratyphoid enteric fevers

Polio is another disease which is also related to improper sanitation and hygiene.

Every day the tradespeople in our industry are the first line of defence for public health and safety.

Yet we seem to be undervalued. Doctors mostly come along after the event when someone is sick, nurses provide care for the sick and yet again our industry is required to get the waste and hazardous material away from hospitals and clinics. What risk are we put at?

Look at the Ebola virus which is passed through contact with human fluids - what has been done to protect our industry?

What would happen if Ebola got to New Zealand - would the Minister of Building and Housing warn the plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers about the dangers of dealing with the body fluids of infected people?

The Black Death epidemic had run its course by the early 1350s, but the plague reappeared every few generations for centuries. Modern sanitation and public-health practices have greatly mitigated the impact of the disease but people seem to forget that even those efforts have not eliminated the plague.

Plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying has an essential connection with public health. Many people forget, that before public water and sanitation existed, there were repeated outbreaks of cholera, dysentery, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, influenza, yellow fever, and other diseases.

In the early 19th century, 100,000 people died each year in the United States alone from diarrhea-enteritis and dysentery, and 23,000 from typhoid. This is nearly non-existent now due to the public health focus on plumbing and drainlaying. That public health focus spread throughout the developed world and the professional people in the industry have afforded the protection needed to make this happen - yes our industry are those professional people!

We as tradespeople make sure everything is done correctly to prevent cross connections, leakage etc. As the PGD Board are always telling the public in their media releases, faulty installations can result in illness, injury or property damage. So as tradespeople we promote health through prevention of human contact with the hazards of wastes as well as the treatment and proper disposal of sewage and wastewater.

Sanitation is about the prevention of human contact with the unmentionables. Some diseases and conditions caused by lack of sanitation and hygiene include waterborne diseases, which can contaminate drinking water, diseases transmitted by the fecal-oral route, and infections with intestinal helminths (worms).

Apparently approximately two billion people are infected with soil-transmitted helminths (worms) worldwide which are transmitted by eggs present in human faeces which in turn contaminate soil in areas where sanitation is poor.

What we are saying is that our worth seems to be undervalued, even by the industry. Is it going to take some form of outbreak before our worth is seen?

There are so many facets of everyday life that our industry affects – for example at restaurants where we ensure necessary equipment is in place, safe and installed correctly. Our work involves more than just the kitchen sink. For instance, if a carbonated beverage machine backflows, the carbonated material can corrode copper pipes, which may lead to copper poisoning and can be life-threatening to small children.

What about at home? There is the chance of scolding, gas leaks, explosions, flooding and when water turns hot or cold abruptly, people jump. And when people jump in slippery showers, they are very likely to fall and sustain serious injury - that's just to name a few.

Would the Minister of Building and Housing take precautions to protect the plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers or would it be a case of it's not construction so it's not the Minister's problem.

If we were to clear a blocked drain from an infected person what is the chance of catching Ebola and what precautions should be taken?

There are worldwide epidemics like SARS, Bird Flu and Ebola and probably a lot of others we don't know about but what we do know is that our industry has both ends of the public to deal with, water and food in and you know what out.

So is being deemed to be part of the construction industry the best thing for the industry and for the protection of the health and safety of the public?

What is the biggest responsibility of our industry -is it construction or protecting the health and safety of members of the public?

The legislation says it's for the protection of the health and safety of members of the public so why doesn't the government place the regulation of the industry where we can do the most good?

We all know plumbing is the critical delivery and waste system for water – but what about plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers involved with medical gases and liquids? Hospitals and clinics need to circulate hazardous substances, and it takes a special kind of expertise to understand how to do this safely.

Plumbing, gasfitting, drainlaying and public health go way back and New Zealand is lucky to have tradespeople who are not only highly skilled, but passionate about their work so why aren't we telling people and standing up for ourselves? We should be letting the public and others know how good we are and promote our industry not just glide along and take what we are given.

The Government should note that for any social and economic development, adequate sanitation in conjunction with good hygiene and safe water are essential to good health. Lack of proper sanitation causes diseases and most of the diseases resulting from sanitation have a direct relation to poverty. So why doesn't the Government stop pissing around with our industry and give us the fairness and equality we deserve before there aren't enough tradespeople to protect the "Public".

Plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers are the first line of defence for the public and we should be proud of that. The public and Government should be appreciative of our efforts and we should be rewarded appropriately. We don't deserve to be in a thankless job where we are forever having to prove our competence. When you look at the risks we take and what we contribute to New Zealand we deserve better.

Step up, be proud of what you do and let others know how much they need us. The health of New Zealanders is in our hands.



So bring back the plague, well not yet we will stand by our industry where prevention is better than cure.

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