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IN OTHER NEWS

Laying the Blame

Remember the leaking building saga where design and product were at fault but tradespeople got blamed which resulted in the introduction of Continuing Professional Development.

Then the Minister of Building and Construction said he would go after the tradespeople who didn't do their jobs right, or words to that effect.

Last week we picked up on this article.

Building boom scarcity means new products

NZ Newswire on January 10, 2017, 4:01 am

Auckland's construction boom has led builders to turn to substitute products as traditional materials become harder to find.

Council building control general manager Ian McCormick urges builders to save themselves and their clients thousands of dollars by making sure the new products are "up to code".

The items have to meet the New Zealand Building Code and be fit for the intended use for the lifetime of the building.

Is There a Plan?



2017 has arrived in all its finery, and we are asking ourselves this question - Is there an official Government assistance plan for the plumbing gasfitting and drainlaying industry? In fact is there any plan at all? You see it all the time in the media - someone is getting assistance from the

Government, but we have never heard of the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industry ever getting any assistance.

Is our industry the victim of a non responsive government - a Government that imposes restrictions on our industry by way of legislation, but what else do they do? The Federation believes the Government don't do enough to support and promote the industry so it can progress, whilst meeting the requirements of the legislation.

The Government does nothing to encourage the industry they simply use fear of prosecution and unemployment to impose their will on us. When individuals or organisations speak up for change the Government shut down communication until the industry is forced around to their way of thinking. They use Ministries stacked with bureaucrats to advise them. This limited knowledge does nothing but impede the progression of the industry and undermines the intent of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006 and other regulations.

Perhaps the Government is happy with what is happening, particularly in Auckland and Christchurch, as they have someone to blame in the future and yes it's the tradespeople. Maybe the Government is turning a blind eye to all the issues because the labour and material issues are helping keep construction costs down. What are the issues you ask:

Suspected high number of unlicensed/unauthorised people undertaking work in Auckland and Christchurch. Large numbers of immigrants working on these sites give rise to speculation that these people are not properly authorised to undertake plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying. Are the Council's playing their part in following up on licenses when doing consent checks – we suspect not. A conspiracy theorist might say that the government is turning a blind eye to what is going on in Auckland and Christchurch simply so the numbers of houses can still be churned out. We've heard some real

"We're seeing innovative new products and processes entering the market," Mr McCormick said.

"That's great news because it improves the whole industry."

The sticking point for builders in a hurry was in the time it took for the council to assess a new product, but Mr McCormick said less haste would mean less waste.

He also cautioned against falling for a cheap price and quick turnaround if the deal looked too good to be true.

"While there are some great new products on the market, the boom has attracted a few cowboys trying to cut corners and some importers trying to bring in cheap, substandard products," he said.

He cited one example of a hasty substitution as when an imported roofing product, which cost 40 per cent less, was used for several houses.

However, the substitution wasn't disclosed until the job was finished and the roofing had to be replaced because it didn't comply with the code.

Where is the Government in all this? They have simply covered their arse by placing the responsibility on the tradespeople.

"The items have to meet the New Zealand Building Code and be fit for the intended use for the lifetime of the building".

Have we reached the stage where as a tradesperson we need to be a researcher, a scientist, a lawyer and a negotiator?

Tradespeople are now expected to enforce product quality or face the consequences. Where does

horror stories about cheap, imported materials being used in builds, lack of safe working conditions and a number of people who are not known to the local industry and therefore more than likely not licensed and authorised to be doing this sort of work. We know large numbers of immigrants attend pre-trades but do not follow on to complete an apprenticeship. Where do they go? Give you two guesses!

The Gas certification scheme is another example where the bureaucracy is at fault but trades people will get the blame in the future when issues arise. This comment was found on the Plumbers Forum:

Think on this..... we are living in a period of an unprecedented housing shortage, so rightfully we are pushing for more new homes.....that is a lot of new gas installs.....

None of these new installs need to be registered with any formal register or government agency.....

The Federation is calling for Energy Safety and the Government to hand back Gas Certification to the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board. At the moment it sits in a black hole – it is confusing to Certifying Gasfitters and certainly the public at large don't understand it at all. The old system was transparent, easy to follow and meant that all gas installs were certified. The current systems requires almost a Doctorate to understand – evidenced by the fact that ESS staff are still attending seminars to explain to Gasfitters the difference in low risk, general and high risk some three years after the implementation of the scheme. It's time for someone in Government to put their hand up and admit they got this whole system arse about face and that they should have listened to practitioners in the first place.

The Industry is too busy fighting for equality and correcting historical government cock ups and has no time for innovation. This forces the industry to persevere operating in small groups or as individuals and doesn't allow for collective progression. There are a lot of great ideas out there but a huge amount of the industry is comprised of sole traders who simply don't have the time or resources to be able to participate in developing the industry so it gets left to a few dedicated people.

In the past the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board copped a lot of criticism for forcing the industry to do what the Government wanted and this was with good cause because it was the WAY that they went about it. They did exactly what the Government did, no real communication with the industry and relied on a few people and organisations that supported their way of thinking or benefited financially from their way of thinking. The Board have changed a lot – they listen now and seek industry feedback – this has resulted in huge improvements – now practitioners are helping by giving feedback and reporting unauthorised work.

We have thousands of tradespeople who are registered in the industry who rely on the honesty and integrity of the Government and the Board. Thousands of tradespeople who want to be treated in a fair and equitable manner.

the responsibility of the designers/architects/engineers come into it? All of these people are paid considerably more than tradespeople.

Why is it that the people who gets paid the least have the most responsibility and are held accountable to the highest degree?

The Federation believes tradespeople are becoming the victims of dictatorships operating within the Government.

Tradespeople don't have any fair or equitable representation and are treated like second class citizens.

Politicians from all parties have ignored the plight of tradespeople with regard to training and fairness and equality in the legislation that regulates the industries.

Practitioners operating in the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Industry are in a category of tradespeople that are at high risk of being held accountable in the future. This has already been threatened by the Government and the legislation has been stacked against the tradespeople.

What are tradespeople to do when the consumer or property developer supply their own fittings and tapware etc? The Government expects the tradesperson to refuse to install the items if they don't think they are fit for purpose or to take responsibility for them.

Not much of a choice you either loose the job and income or take responsibility for the products.

It appears there is very much a situation where the Government seems to know about the issues but is turning a blind eye to it as they have someone to blame in the

As an industry we need the Government to contribute to the wellbeing of those working in the industry, in particular the tradespeople. The Government and its departments use the fear factor to keep individuals and fractions of the industry isolated and only meet and keep close to them those who support their way of thinking. This is a toxic situation and keeps the industry divided.

Some would say it's up to the industry to run itself and it is only the Government's job to supply the legislative framework for that to happen. It is about governance of the industry and having a body in place that can support the industry. It's about what is and isn't contributed.

The Government contributes by:

- Supplying the legislation under which we as an industry operate. One of their tasks is to review the legislation - but that appears to have fallen by the way side as the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006 is over a decade old and has been operating for nearly six and a half years without review. The Act stated a review was to be done after three years. What has happened with that? Where are we at?

- The government also contributes by throwing money to Skills, the Industry Training Organisation, as a contribution to assessments. We would say "training" but that isn't the case as training is sadly lacking and only to level four to show numbers of people completing so called training. Is this the right place for all this money – certainly Industry has a number of questions around Skill's performance.

Remember that people at level four are deemed not competent in the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industry as they still require extensive supervision. ***We are possibly the only industry where an individual completes an apprenticeship but is still required to be supervised to apply anything that they have learnt.***

The Government allows:

- Individuals to purchase their own sanitary plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying fittings and fixtures but still puts the onus on the tradesperson to make sure it is fit for purpose.

- The Government allows individuals to purchase their own sanitary plumbing gasfitting and drainlaying fittings and fixtures which creates the perfect storm for individuals to do their own work but expect the industry to pay to stop them from doing it or to prosecute after the fact.

The Government does not contribute to:

- Prosecuting unauthorised people (i.e. Members of the Public) but yet reap the benefits from fines and such like.

- Disciplining registered practitioners.

- Operating costs for registration and licensing.

future – us the tradespeople who pay to enforce the legislation for the Government and pay to prosecute ourselves.

A large proportion of the industry is approaching an age where they are sick of fighting for their rights and are simply walking away.

If the Government lets this situation continue and keeps losing this experience then New Zealand trained plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers industry will cease to exist – but then again, maybe this is what the Government want after all.....

Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy holding us down?

Apparently the richest one per cent of New Zealanders hold one fifth of the country's wealth.

90 per cent of the New Zealand's population owns less than half the country's wealth. A lot of trades people are in that bracket and are flooded with bureaucracy adding unfair costs.

The gap between the extremely wealthy and the rest is greater than most think.

New Zealanders love fairness, not inequality and when they don't get it they resist the legislation imposed on them. This encourages tax avoidance.

A recent Oxfam report said findings in New Zealand are on par with other countries, lumping blame on big businesses and the super-rich.

- Governance of the industry.
- Promotion of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006.

Get the situation into perspective – the Government only seems to intervene when they stand to gain from the situation. Gasfitting certification was changed to save the Government a couple of million in administration costs but the result was increased costs to the industry and the consumer and has lowered the protection afforded.

They throw money at an ineffective level 4 assessment regime to make their training figures look good for the public but the industry is left with inconsistent training and assessment and poorly trained people. Practitioners want to progress past level 4 have been on their own and it is only now that the trade shortage has hit that notice is being taken of the problems.

Now the Government is looking at amalgamating licensing and registration with others in the construction industry. We don't see how anyone but the Government will benefit from such a scheme. As an industry all we will be doing is footing some of the bill for the administrative costs of MBIE. This reduces Government costs but not ours, so we end up paying twice, once as an industry and once as a tax payer. As well we say give us one example where a government department ends up being more cost effective than a standalone entity.

Hell, simply the number of “policy advisers” alone in MBIE is enough to send a shiver up the spine. This particular group of people seem to have one skill set – and that is to slow down progress and turn something simple into something complex – almost overnight. Those of you who are familiar with the TV programme “The Meaning of Live” will know that policy advisers should be set adrift on the same boat as lawyers.

It seems the Minister's role is one of being a dictator. As an industry we don't even get the opportunity to apply for positions on the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board anymore. We are not sure what prompted this change – but now these positions are solely Ministerial Appointments without the benefit of applications from wider industry.

It appears there is no learning from the past so the industry can move forward - just more of the same failings from the Government which they blame the tradespeople for. Read the side column for more on “laying the blame”.

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