

The Honourable Glen Milliner, FAIM

Queensland

Building
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

20th September, 2004

Dear Sir,

One of the major issues facing building regulators is the growth of the do it yourself or renovation market. These projects can range from small cosmetic changes to a room to major construction projects involving structural changes to the building. It is estimated that this sector of the building and construction industry is worth \$2.2 billion annually¹

This growth has been bought about in part by the popularity of television programs portraying do it yourself renovation as quite simple and relatively easy. In many cases the presenters on these programs undertaking the project are highly skilled and experienced tradespersons and professionals.

A vast number of people who undertake do it yourself projects and renovations are ill equipped to undertake the tasks. They have little or no understanding of the complexities involved in building and construction.

They have little or no knowledge of the Building Code of Australia (BAC) or where to access it. In many cases they are not aware or ignore the legal requirements for building. Many do it yourself renovations are undertaken without the necessary approvals or permits nor do inspections by qualified certifiers or professionals take place during the project.

If accurate data were available as to the extent of illegal building work in Australia it should give grave concern as to the effectiveness of the enforcement requirements within the sector.

In many cases illegal construction or renovations do not conform with building regulations or the BCA.

¹ BRW Magazine 2nd September, 2004

It is possible to enter any hardware retailer or building supplier and purchase electrical, plumbing and gas fitting equipment. It is illegal for other than a licensed person to install these products. In many renovation projects non licensed persons are undertaking electrical, plumbing and gas fitting work. The safety of those persons who performed the illegal installation or those persons who enter and use these buildings could be in danger because of incorrect installations.

Many home renovators are unaware of the requirements for handling dangerous products including asbestos. The removal of asbestos if not undertaken correctly is a highly dangerous process. One of the consequences of incorrect handling of asbestos can be death. The Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia Inc. have estimated the number of people diagnosed with asbestos related diseases will not peak until 2020 when they claim 53,000 cases of incurable cancer caused by asbestos will be identified over the next 20 years²

A problem that exists is confusion caused by multiple jurisdictions having authority over different building materials containing asbestos. For example, in Queensland the Department of Industrial Relations through its division of Workplace Health & Safety maintains safety standards for the handling of asbestos at workplaces, while the responsibility for asbestos control in homes is the jurisdiction of both Local Councils and the Environmental Protection Agency.

It would be unrealistic to suggest that the do it yourself or the home renovation market can or should be wound back, however a number of measures can be taken to assist those who wish to embark on these projects including.

- An education campaign to alert perspective home renovators and do it yourself participants of the legal requirements for building and renovating including gaining the necessary permits and inspections and compliance with the BCA;
- Make the BCA free of charge and available on the internet (as legislation is);
- An extensive education campaign to alert prospective do it yourself and home renovator of the potential dangers of undertaking building and construction tasks particularly as far as dangerous products such as asbestos is concerned;
- Point of sale information available to warn consumers that electrical, plumbing and gas fitting work can only be carried out by licensed persons;
- The need to establish a information centre to advise on the appropriate authority for information on the handling of hazardous materials such as asbestos

² estimated by Prof. Henderson – Flinders University

The reform agenda in the building and construction industry is stalling. There is an urgent need to reignite the agenda. Given the significant contribution that building and construction makes to the Australian economy, governments

at all levels must work together to ensure that reforms in the building and construction sector are advanced. The reform and harmonisation of building regulation will continue to stall unless action is taken at the highest level to “drive” the reform and harmonisation agenda. There is an urgent need to establish a Ministerial Council to achieve this objective.

The Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) has played a major roll in advancing the reform agenda through the development of the BCA. However the roll of the ABCB could be expanded to effectively be a secretariat to coordinate suggested changes to building regulations before being put to a Ministerial Council.

I hope the above information is of interest to your inquiry, if you would like further information please do not hesitate to contact me on my mobile telephone on xxxx xxx xxx.

Yours sincerely,

Hon Glen Milliner, FAIM