



## Media Release

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

### Victorian regulators strengthen compliance during Bairnsdale inspection blitz

Construction regulators have rolled out a week long compliance and safety inspection blitz in East Gippsland identifying two sites deemed high risk.

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA), Energy Safe Victoria, WorkSafe, and Environment Protection Authority (EPA) joined forces in Bairnsdale to educate and inform plumbing, carpentry, and electrical apprentices on environmental matters, construction safety and compliance requirements as part of the Build Aware campaign.

The regionally-focused Build Aware campaign seeks to raise industry awareness about safety, environmental, building and plumbing compliance.

More than 170 inspections were carried out over the period accompanied by well attended education and information sessions at Gippsland TAFE.

A trade evening provided an opportunity for building industry practitioners to ask about regulations.

The **VBA** did 102 inspections in Bairnsdale and identified several sites with noncompliant building or plumbing work, with noncompliant work found predominantly in wet areas and framing.

The two sites identified by the VBA as of greater risk will be issued with rectification orders, paid for by the practitioner.

The VBA also provided advice to carpentry and plumbing students about how to become licenced or registered in their chosen field and the opportunities available to them.

**Energy Safe** focused on the safety aspects of gas, solar power, and electricity, with a special emphasis on the risks associated with live powerlines. Its team conducted inspections at 10 sites involving operations near overhead powerlines and underground cables finding good compliance with safety requirements, including the use of registered Spotters to help workers stay a safe distance from overhead powerlines. They also conducted educational sessions for carpentry and plumbing apprentices on the hazards of working near live powerlines especially around house demolitions and rebuilds, renovations and extensions.

For solar energy, they audited five residential installations, offering guidance to contractors. In the gas sector, Energy Safe visited about 20 sites with complex installations, emphasising the safety responsibilities of owners and operators while also promoting gas safety to local industry stakeholders.

**EPA** Victoria Officers for the Protection of the Local Environment (OPLEs) inspected eight sites, focusing on new residential and aged care development areas. and spoke to second-year carpentry apprentices at the TAFE information session about the General Environmental Duty (GED) and the environmental impact of construction activities.

#### Media Enquiries:

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A notable concern identified by the officers was the insufficient dust suppression measures at active sites, highlighting the need for better practices like using water trucks and controlling the speed of heavy vehicles in dusty areas.

**WorkSafe's** visits focused on the dangers of crystalline silica dust in construction and the need for fall prevention measures. Across 44 site visits, inspectors issued 15 improvement notices, with the most common issues being incomplete or unsafe scaffolding, unsafe electrical equipment, and failure to adequately control the risk of falls. Safety issues at a further five sites were able to be immediately addressed. WorkSafe also presented to Gippsland TAFE electrical, carpentry and plumbing students on the common construction hazards specific to their sector.

### **Victorian Building Authority CEO Anna Cronin**

*"Our focus was reinforcing the importance of compliance and safety in the building industry, crucial to the safety of those occupying these buildings.*

*Pleasingly we had a high level of cooperation and regulations were being adhered which is a testament to the industry's ongoing commitment to improving standards.*

*Our role extends beyond enforcement; we provide education and support to practitioners a key part of our role. Build Aware Bairnsdale is part of our ongoing effort to promote a culture of safety and compliance throughout Victoria's building and plumbing sectors."*

### **Energy Safe CEO Leanne Hughson**

*"One of our priorities is enforcing a range of electrical safety issues, particularly the minimum distance that must be kept from powerlines.*

*"Last year there was a significant rise in the number of incidents where people, machinery and other equipment made contact with powerlines across Victoria.*

*"Fortunately there were no fatalities and it's important to keep it that way, but there were injuries which is always a concern."*

### **WorkSafe Director of Construction and Earth Resources Matt Wielgosz**

*"Falls from height sadly remain one of the leading causes of death and serious injury on Victorian construction sites, so it's vital that the right safety measures are in place for the type of work being done. We're also reminding employers that the risk of crystalline silica dust exposure is not limited to working with engineered stone and that failing to provide appropriate protection puts workers at risk of respiratory disease.*

*"These visits are a welcome opportunity for our inspectors to engage with regional employers and employees."*

### **Environment Protection Authority Program Manager Megan Vallas**

*"EPA will continue to provide advice to the building, construction and demolition industries on ways to prevent harm to human health and to the environment, while enforcing the law with improvement notices and other regulatory tools if and when required.*

*Build Aware provides EPA with a great opportunity to continue to educate the building, construction and demolition industries regarding their environmental obligations and to work collaboratively with other co-regulators."*

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