

MEDIA RELEASE

## UNSAFE EXCAVATIONS UNEARTHED ON THE SURF COAST

The VBA has directed that excavation works cease immediately on two potentially unsafe building sites in Lorne.

The sites were identified by a VBA inspector during the week-long **Build Aware** program conducted throughout Greater Geelong and the Surf Coast.

At one construction site, a three-metre deep excavation had been dug without evidence of stabilisation of earthworks.

At another site, a four-metre excavation had been dug without proof of the required appropriate reinforcement in the footings and to the side of the excavation along with the possibility the side wall of the dig would collapse.

The VBA has exercised its powers to issue a 'Direction to Fix' under the Building Act and has notified the Municipal Building Surveyor who may issue an Emergency Order to the builder to make the site safe.

In addition the building practitioner must ensure the adjoining property is also secure and the required building standards are being achieved so excavation works can recommence.

This can be done by various methods including underpinning footings or retaining structures.

VBA Director of Enquiries, Inspections and Complaints, Murray Smith says the Building Act states a project must be inspected by a registered building surveyor at specified times during the build.

"The VBA's pro-active inspection team visits randomly selected building sites to review building works, making sure they comply with the Building Act and regulations and approved building permit."

Mr Smith says recent changes to building legislation means owners must now appoint the building surveyor directly and that surveyor must stay with the project until its completion.

"In the past builders had the ability to appoint the building surveyor, this is no longer legal so it's an important change to the law affecting both owners and builders."

The VBA is monitoring the sites in question to ensure the rectification work has been completed and the sites are safe, compliant and consistent with professional standards.

Ends

## **About Build Aware**

**Build Aware** is a combined regulatory initiative by the VBA, Worksafe, EPA, Energy Safe and CAV, aimed at increasing compliance in the construction and demolition sectors with building, construction, OH&S laws and regulations, environment and consumer rights.

## **Under the Building Act**

There appeared to be no support to an elevated driveway, a parking space and landscaping on the adjoining property. Ongoing investigations will determine whether the dig had the potential to further undermine the foundations of a weatherboard house and property next door.

Protection works must be undertaken on any construction which has the potential to cause significant damage to the adjoining allotments buildings or property.

The Building Regulations also stipulate all excavations must be done in a safe and workmanlike manner. Neither provision appeared to have been undertaken to the extent required. Under the Occupational Health and Work Safety Act, a retaining wall also needs to be built to provide a safe work place for excavations deeper than 1.5 meters or where considered unsafe.

The builder was allegedly continuing to deepen the dig using a rock breaker claw attached to an excavator which has the ability to impact the sides of the excavation by dislodgement and vibration possibly causing a collapse.

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