

Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Submission from John Samuel

Dear Hon Simon O'Brien

Petition No. 118 - White Set Plaster.

The subject matter is White Set Plaster.

I have conferred sufficiently with the appropriate people before presenting this petition, so I have not done so lightly. This group consists of true industry experts, legal, political, and consumers.

I have not been to the Ombudsman.

The Problem

The problem of inferior quality White Set is evidenced by the existence of the White Set Working Group, and inferior quality has been around for a long time.

True expert plasterers are not tradesmen. They are craftsmen and/or artists. This is an internationally accepted fact that has even been accepted by the SAT.

It is a problem that concerns every person in WA, whether they own or rent a residence. It is the biggest investment they ever make and spend the best years of their lives paying for.

The extent of the problem

The White Set Working Group report suggests that 10% of homes may have inferior quality plaster. The defect can be visual and/or physical.

At the meeting of the Working Group on 17 March 2016 I suggested that the real figure was more like 60%. This statement was not challenged. Rather it was stated to me by one person that if I made this public I could be responsible for bringing the building industry into disrepute and could send some builders broke. (Let's shoot the messenger!) There was no statement or signs of concern about the plight of consumers who "purchased a Holden and got delivered a Lada Niva".

I also mentioned that not only does everybody know about inferior quality plaster, but they also know about inferior quality in other trades, some of which are serious structural defects like roofs and ceilings not fixed properly and that soon, when the wind blows, someone could die.

The solution

There is an urgent need for:

1. The regulation of building inspectors
2. A "Gold Card" system for trades, as per Queensland.
3. The introduction of quality standards for WA (including the ACL).

I would be pleased to attend any public enquiry to expand and elaborate on what serious industry stakeholders have advised me needs to be done to address the problems.

There are some serious issues and it is going to take serious people to resolve them. This precludes the people who have had the responsibility of regulating the industry and protecting the consumer, but who have sat idly by and watched these issues proliferate. Unscrupulous builders are laughing all the way to the bank.

Some catchphrases to consider that I think are relevant, because it is too late for miracles:

1. Don't send a boy on a man's mission.
2. You can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs.
3. Don't put Dracula in charge of the blood bank.
4. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Einstein said "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results".

The Willis/Fletcher matter is a classic disaster. Injustice if you like. A dangerous precedent. Both parties lost. The builder who created the problem got off scott free, without so much as a by your leave.

There is a standard for White Set Plaster, it is just that some people do not want to accept it or even talk about it.