

# WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

All too often the plumber ends up having to rectify problems when products fail – even if the failure has nothing to do with the product selection or installation process. Paul Oliveri identifies some of the dangers to watch out for.

In the plumbing industry the WaterMark scheme offers assurance that products are evaluated to meet minimum requirements for safety and performance. So, does that mean products holding WaterMark certification are *always* guaranteed against failure or performance issues? That depends.

## UNFORESEEN FACTORS

While the WaterMark scheme ensures plumbing products sold in Australia are held to some of the highest standards in the world, their performance out in the field can be impacted by unforeseen factors.

Burst flexible hose under the kitchen sink? Leaking mixer tap? Poor flow from the “new” showerhead?

These are all examples of failures that the WaterMark scheme catches well before the product is sold to consumers. But who is responsible when a product holding WaterMark certification fails in service?

Generally, the manufacturer that sold the product and/or the plumber who installed it will get the finger pointed at them first, which in some cases might be the correct course of action. But the consumer can quickly be left frustrated chasing a solution to a problem that no one may be directly responsible for.

## PERFORMANCE ISSUES?

What can a plumber do about failures or performance issues? Providing the installation was completed to AS/NZS 3500, all a plumber can really do to rectify failures or performance issues is to handball it across the trade desk of their local plumbing supplier, or possibly chase up the manufacturer.



If you were to ask a few plumbers how much time they have to chase up manufacturers, WaterMark Conformity Assessment Bodies (WMCABs) or testing labs to relay their concerns on product issues, you would be met with an answer somewhere near zero.

What if a manufacturer has concerns with the WaterMark process and the associated Australian standards? Perhaps the standard used to test their products is outdated or too general in its application, which in turn allows their products to end up in all sorts of trouble. Some Australian standards date back to the 1990s, which means products that have only recently become available may be well outside of the scope of an old standard.

## GET INVOLVED

Manufacturers, consumers, and plumbers can become involved in the way standards are formed and revised with draft proposals to highlight areas where the standards can be improved, or even to suggest the formation of new standards, where required. Australian standards are often revised from the preparation of a draft proposal formed by an individual who has sought the support of a variety of key industry stakeholders.

Feedback from plumbers about product performance in the field can be invaluable when repeated failures of common products occur and plumbers wish to raise their concerns. Product WaterMark and WMCAB information can be easily obtained via the ABCB website ([www.abcb.gov.au](http://www.abcb.gov.au)), and information provided about product issues can help fix holes in current standards, product compliance issues, or even allow new standards to be created.

## TESTING TIMES

What if it's a problem with the laboratories responsible for testing? Results can vary between labs with factors such as instrument calibration, test setup, standards interpretation, and human error all contributing to possible variables. International laboratory testing can also yield issues where test equipment may be calibrated to different standard measures than those used in Australia. Even the interpretation of Australian standards by labs in non-English-speaking parts of the world can be an issue. But probably, in my opinion, the most obvious cause for concern with questionable certified products found in Australia is the way in which some international laboratories are given their 'licence' to certify our products to the WaterMark scheme.

One thing is certain in all this uncertainty. If communication between WMCABs, the Standards committees, laboratories, plumbers and consumers is open, then the WaterMark scheme will continue to improve the performance and reliability of plumbing products in Australia.

Just remember that despite the occasional frustration with a product's performance, Australia as a continent is the only place on earth where we can confidently open any tap from coast to coast and wet our palate without worry of being sick. ■

*For more information, please feel free to contact PROVE Standards and Engineering.*

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