

WHEREFORE ART THOU WATERMARK?

PLUMBING PRODUCTS IN AUSTRALIA ARE WELL-KNOWN TO HAVE HIGH STANDARDS COURTESY OF THE MANDATORY WATERMARK CERTIFICATION SCHEME (WMCS). HOWEVER, WHAT IS NOT AS WELL-KNOWN IS THE NUMBER OF PRODUCTS INTEGRAL TO OUR PLUMBING NETWORK WHICH LACK THIS PROTECTIVE BLANKET. **TERRY NGUYEN** EXPLAINS.

Products such as bath tubs and shower bases are no longer scrutinised as well as they used to be for their on-going compliance with Australian Standards.

Products that are covered under the WMCS are those which have been deemed as having a higher associated risk in terms of maintaining the integrity of our potable water supply, and the safe and effective removal of waste water. The WMCS also exists to ensure products are manufactured to meet minimum quality requirements in Australian Standards so they are fit for purpose once installed. Products which are, and are not, covered by the WaterMark scheme are listed and can be easily found on the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) website by navigating through to the WaterMark section.

While there are valid reasons for having products now deregulated from the WMCS, their departure from the scheme has also created some unusual side effects. One problem created actually speaks of the robustness of the WaterMark scheme. There are plumbers who don't realise that products such as baths or shower bases are not covered, as they have been removed from the mandatory certification scheme. The scheme works so well for products it covers



Bath tubs and shower bases are two products now exempt from WaterMark.

that plumbers can easily let their guard down on products which they were unaware had lost that level of protection. It is worth noting that while baths or shower bases are deregulated, the waste outlets (integral or non-integral) fitted to these products must be WaterMark certified.

The unfortunate result is that unknowing plumbers sometimes end up the ones having to face the misdirected wrath of consumers who have, and often at no fault of their own,

purchased a sub-standard product.

As bath tubs and shower bases are two products now exempt from WaterMark, they often fly under the radar as they are not seen as products which pose much threat to the community from a health perspective. Although this is true, they are also two products which often create the largest re-work cost due to product failure. There are horror stories of home owners having to rebuild entire bathrooms only weeks old after faulty built-in fixtures (such as baths and shower bases) required removal, and matching tiles to complete the repairs were then unable to be re-sourced.

Baths and shower bases are susceptible to failures from triggers like thermal shock, impact, chemical and UV exposure just to name a few. Recent times have also seen these

“ WITHOUT A STRUCTURED CERTIFICATION SCHEME, INFERIOR PRODUCTS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO REACH OUR MARKET THROUGH MULTIPLE AVENUES. ”

fixtures being made from different types of composite materials which has resulted in these failures becoming more prevalent than ever.

Expensive failures in construction usually see manufacturers, consumers and installers all looking to pass the blame where possible. Was the product manufactured to Australian Standards specifications, or simply supplied under a manufacturer's claim that it is fit for purpose? Did the plumber show due diligence when selecting a product for the project? Did the consumer consciously decide to purchase a product far cheaper than all of its competitors and not question its unusually low price tag? PROVE is often involved with assisting in the root cause of product failure, with the only certain winners in these cases being the solicitors.

Without a structured certification scheme, inferior products have the potential to reach our market through multiple avenues. Those who deliberately choose to exploit weaknesses, and those who do not understand how to have their product properly assessed. An important fact is that while these products do not need to demonstrate compliance with Australian Standards through certification, the manufacturers remain accountable for their product under implied Australian consumer law to ensure their product is suitable and fit for purpose. Under Australian law a 'manufacturer' also includes anyone who is responsible for importing a product from overseas.

It is important to do some homework when selecting a product, particularly for large scale projects where the

risk is multiplied by the total amount of fixtures. There are many great products available to the Australian consumer which comfortably meet and exceed minimum performance standards, and it never hurts to request evidence from the manufacturer that their product is in fact all it is claimed to be. Although baths and shower bases have been deregulated, it is comforting to know that there are still a few manufacturers who insist on testing their products to Australian Standards requirements, even when this has been deemed non-mandatory. ■

Contact:

For information on performance requirements of bath tubs and shower bases please contact PROVE Standards & Engineering. www.proveng.com.au

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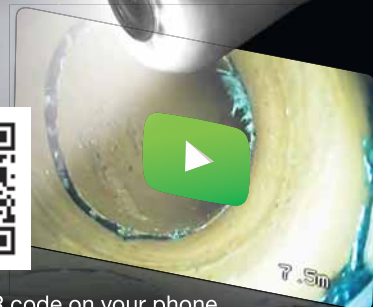
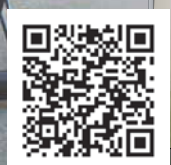
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