

Shoddy builders, plumbers exposed

SUZAN DELIBASIC

HUNDREDS of Victorian builders and plumbers have been slapped with large fines for shoddy work including dangerous cladding, sinking houses and bad plumbing.

The Sunday Herald Sun can reveal more than 200 builders and plumbers were fined a total of \$1.013m by the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) in the past two financial years.

There were 6810 total complaints received by the authority regarding builders and plumbers in the 2020-22 financial years.

The figures also revealed almost 60 practitioners' licences were suspended, while 25 were cancelled and 16 disqualified.

Domestic and commercial builder Neville Duncanson, who was fined \$57,500 in December last year, carried out building work where no permit was issued, allowed deep unsupported excavations to be carried out and failed to address urgent safety measures directed by the building surveyor.

In another shocking case, building surveyor Michael Flanagan was fined \$50,887 in August last year for the use of combustible cladding for external walls at several sites from 2016-2018.

Domestic builder Phillip Jones was also fined \$40,000 for carrying out building work that was not covered by the required insurance and engaging a plumber to carry out plumbing work that required a compliance certificate when they were not licensed.

The state government last year banned dangerous cladding from multi-storey buildings in Victoria.

It means flammable cladding must not be installed on any new buildings more than two storeys tall – such as flats, shopping centres and factories.

A combustible cladding crackdown last year also resulted in action against dozens of builders linked to 790 properties statewide.

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The seeds of hope

Cancer dad's incredible journey

SARAH BOOTH

FATHER'S Day is extra special for dad of three David Hamilton.

The testicular cancer survivor will spend today with the three children – Evie and identical 15-month-old twins Vera and Bella – he thought he may never have.

His first daughter's middle name is Hope, testament to all that he and wife Amanda went through to have her.

Several

years ago, Mr Hamilton was just 28 when he was diagnosed with testicular cancer that had already spread, creating another tumour "the size of a football".

He and wife Amanda were told he may never have biological children, but that all changed and their first daughter was born four years ago, thanks to innovative surgery that was pioneered in the US.

"It was pretty heartbreaking, really, being told that we weren't going

to have kids," Mr Hamilton said.

"(Evie's birth) was life-changing. We were overjoyed. Going from being told that we would probably never have kids naturally to then having Evie was pretty amazing."

Now their Heathcote home is filled with the laughter of three children who defied the odds to be here.

"The twins keep us on our toes, keep things interesting," Mr Hamilton said. "Evie's really good with them, she helps out a bit."

Urological surgeon Darren Katz visited New York 10 years ago to learn the technique known

as micro-TESE.

Dr Katz – whose office wall is adorned with photos of the children his patients had been told they would never have – operated on Mr Hamilton at the Epworth Richmond.

He said the surgery was not offered widely in Australia and was extremely difficult – "like looking for a needle in a haystack" – but rewarding.

"I've seen lots of tears from men in the recovery room," he said. "I'm just very honoured and humbled when patients come to me and I can help them."

The team uses a high-powered microscope to look for sperm embedded in the tissue of a testicle and

HAPPY
Father's
DAY

involves up to 12 people – including embryologists from an IVF laboratory.

Dr Katz said the team would examine the tiny pieces of tissue removed in real time so they could let him know whether he needed to keep looking or if they'd found usable sperm.

"Some of these men have been told 'you can't have children, there's no chance or very little chance'," he said. "And through this technique, we can give them hope."

Dr Katz urged men to visit a urologist and said many men thought infertility was only an issue for women.

Amanda's Father's Day message is a simple one: Get checked.

It could help men be around for many more Father's Days to come.
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David Hamilton with Evie, 4, and twins Bella and Vera, 15 months. Picture: Jason Edwards

Group KOs 'wife beater' shirts

LINDA SILMALIS

AN idea to sell "wife beater" singlets to raise money for domestic violence charity White Ribbon has been quashed by the organisation.

A senior representative from the charity raised the idea with his colleagues and government officials last week and they allegedly "counselled" against the move.

The idea was among almost 400 initiatives the charity was organising or seeking feedback on for White Ribbon Day on November 25. One of the officials to whom the proposal was floated said the representative had declared the idea had been put to the charity by a third party campaign agency.

A source familiar with the proposal said the plan was for the singlets to be sold for \$1000,

with each having a QR code that directed people to a website with anti-violence information.

White Ribbon Australia co-chairwoman Rosie Batty AO said the notion the charity would contemplate such an idea was "laughable" and "incredulous".

"It is clear someone has misjudged or misunderstood a conversation," she said. "It would simply never, ever happen."



The Queen

Queen sits out event

THE Queen will not attend a traditional highlight of her summer trip to Scotland because of persistent health concerns.

The 96-year-old monarch has been dogged by problems walking and standing since last year, forcing her to cancel several public engagements.

Fears about a flare-up of what royal officials call "episodic mobility problems"

have prevented her returning to London to appoint a new prime minister.

The Queen had been expected to attend the Braemar Gathering near her Balmoral retreat in northeast Scotland this weekend.

A decision on her withdrawal from the event – the most famous on the Highland Games circuit – was made for her comfort.