

No permits or certifications have been provided for any of these 'rectifications'

Access too busy, building's carers don't care

By John Mitchell

It's a contraption Heath Robinson would have admired. A ground floor waste in a commercial tenancy in the Dockside development at Kingston was leaking and trade waste (sewage) was dripping onto cars parked in the basement below.

A tradesman was called, and he had the answer. Scabble out the concrete around the waste, find the leaking pipe joint or flashing collar and repair it? No, that's too expensive. Instead he formed up a steel tray and fixed it to the ceiling of the basement, below the dribbling waste pipe, and then connected the tray by pipe to an open stormwater drain at the perimeter of the basement floor and wall. The goo then makes its way along the drain to an open pit where it mixes with stormwater and, when the pit is full, a pump lifts it up to Lake Burley Griffin.

Doesn't seem right you say? What about the public media campaigns and the simple message 'only rain down the stormwater drains' stencilled on our footpaths.

This writer didn't think so either, so I reported it to Dockside's body corporate manager, Civium Strata. Their manager replied that it was up to the individual owners and tenants to deal with these things.

Then, another pool of stinking waste appeared on the floor elsewhere in the basement. It was overflowing from another tray installed some time ago. That one had been connected to a nearby sewer line by a small bore pipe. It didn't attract any attention until the waste congealed in the pipe backed up and overflowed from the tray.

This time I phoned Access Canberra. A plumbing inspector arrived and said it seemed odd but, if I wanted anything done I would have to make a Controlled Activity Complaint which I did, listing the two tray installations and several other leaks which had not yet been 'attended to'.

In due course a Building Inspector and a Senior Manager arrived on site. After I explained the situation, the Senior Manager got down to business. "I'm a very senior manager and the Government pays me a lot of money, so you're wasting my time and the Government's money in calling me here." He went on to observe that buildings move and this may have caused a pipe joint to crack. I thought, "If the building moved enough to crack a pipe joint, it would have been evacuated by now," but I held my tongue.

The Building Inspector was more forthcoming and afterwards emailed, thanking me for the meeting, asking what actions the body corporate had taken to rectify the issues (the answer is none) and saying he was seeking advice from Access plumbing inspectors.

Two months later he wrote that the plumbing is not faulty, but there may be a wet seal problem and noted that, if the trays are plumbed into the sewer system, they may need a permit but, if they flow onto the floor,



Defective floor trap/sewage pools in ceiling tray/tray connected to perimeter stormwater drain/sewage and stormwater pumped to lake/ Dockside cars with and without sewage protection

they don't.

A month on another email saying that both premises had identified the problem, and once they were fixed the trays would be removed.

Three months later, a further update. No permit applications yet, so no inspections. For my information, the Water and Sewerage Act 2000 has no warranties for plumbing works so no grounds for the plumber to return. If the plumbing hasn't been inspected, and there are issues, the plumber may be required to fix the work.

Five months on one of the premises had been fixed; it was only a defective floor seal, not the plumbing. The plumbing to the second premise had been repaired and the drip tray removed, but there had been no inspection. Access was "satisfied that no further action is needed in relation to the complaint."

Two months later I emailed the inspector, reminding him that the newly installed plumbing in the second tenancy was now leaking and a new tray had been installed. He replied the leaks, "may not be a plumbing

issue but rather a water proofing issue."

The same day the inspector wrote that the original plumbing for the premises had been approved in 2014. "The plumbing works have been rectified and are not believed to be the cause of the leaks.. If there has been any additional work/alterations. [the body corporate] should ensure the works haven't damaged part of the building. The body corporate or lessee should take the necessary steps to ensure the commercial tenancy is maintained and performs as required."

A year later a further five trays have been installed to deal with sewage leaks- three connected to stormwater and two discharging to the floor- and according to a response to an FOI request, no permit or certifications have been provided for any of these 'rectifications.' And they won't be provided, because none of these solutions- connecting sewage to a stormwater system or moving sewage through an open drain- such as the trays- or discharging it on the floor, is permissible under the ACT or any other State Plumbing Code, whether it be for a cup full or a tanker full of waste.