

## Building Products – A Compliance Free Zone?

With more and more building products being manufactured offshore, and increased access to these products, the need to focus on compliance with standards and ensuring a level playing field for Australian manufacturers has never been greater.

Most of us have a story about an encounter with non-genuine consumer products, often purchased on an overseas holiday. A brand name watch that doesn't keep time, a DVD that fails just before the final scene. The reality is that we know what we are getting and expect as much when we pay next to nothing - and if the product lasts then that's just a bonus.

But would we feel the same way about a power point or structural steel in our family home?

There is no doubt that the problem of cheaper non-genuine and non-tested building materials and components making their way into residential building is growing. This has been on the agenda of our building & manufacturing members for some time, but it should equally be of interest to consumers and policy makers.

The cost of failure and subsequent replacement of substandard materials will invariably outstrip any initial savings on the original purchase. And in the case of structural materials, or electrical and sanitary components particularly, the potential cost to the health and safety of our staff or customers is far greater.

So regardless of where something is manufactured, it should meet Australian standards. Unfortunately though, it would seem that the evolution of compliance and enforcement in Australia has not kept pace with changes to our economy and how or where products are manufactured or sourced.

Inconsistent compliance regimes have led to an uneven playing field between the manufacturers that comply with standards, and those that do not. Manufacturers who do the right thing are being disadvantaged against those that neither invest in producing products that meet Australian standards nor programs to demonstrate compliance.

In response to this growing problem, HIA is investigating options for an industry led product registration scheme. Through visiting the register, builders, certifiers and consumers could satisfy themselves that a product is compliant and fit for the purpose and conditions under which it will be used.

HIA also intends to work collaboratively with existing industry based compliance programs and plans to develop an industry education and information program to increase the understanding amongst builders, contractors and suppliers about the importance of compliance.

We are in the business of supplying innovative and world class housing to the residential sector. It is essential to the sustainability of our industry into the future that our customers have confidence in the product they are buying.

There are a lot of locally manufactured and imported materials that help Australian industry build quality homes, provide goods and services to community and drive the economy. Not everything cheap is all bad, but that doesn't mean it's all good either. The question is how can we be sure if they are not all subject to the same transparent compliance regime?