

Vic tightens checks as building gripes soar

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Victoria's Building Control Commission beefed up its investigations division during the year as complaints climbed, and was given greater powers of entry and seizure after amendments to the Building Act.

The commission, the regulatory authority for the building and construction industry and its practitioners in Victoria, boosted the number of investigators from three to six after an overhaul of its procedures during the year.

According to the commission's latest annual report, the focus for the overhaul was to improve its investigative capacity and to reduce the time of each search.

It has also introduced random audits on practitioners to help improve compliance to building laws.

"While efforts to date have been confined to the follow-up of client complaints, a program of proactive building practitioner compliance audits will be introduced," the annual report said.

"Investigations are now proceeding with greater speed and rigour, and from 1 August 1997 this will be assisted by greater powers of search and seizure through Building Act amendment."

Since its formation in 1994, the number of building practitioners registered with the commission has increased from 854 to 20,647.

During the year to June 1997 the commission received 353 complaints against builders, up 40 per cent on the previous year.

Of the complaints received, 15 per cent related to domestic builders and 22 per cent to unregistered practitioners, primarily involved in domestic projects.

About 45 per cent involved complaints against building surveyors and, despite the high percentage, this was a reduction on the previous year.

The most frequently reported problems involved properties adjoining building sites, inspection of building works, and non-compliance with the Building Code of Australia.