

Building laws blasted

HOMEOWNERS are fighting back against dodgy builders and "disgraceful" laws, estimating that defects plague thousands of new homes each year and cost more than \$100 million annually to repair.

The Consumers Collective of Australia, founded by Anne Paten, of Strathmore, is demanding reform of Victoria's builders' warranty insurance laws, claiming they do not give homeowners full protection from "cowboy" builders.

"We are talking thousands, if not tens of thousands, of dissatisfied people," Ms Paten, the collective's president, said.

"We were individually unhappy and going to our local politicians, Building Commission, Consumer Affairs, HIA and others, some of us to VCAT, and our voices were getting lost.

"I estimate it would cost on average \$20,000 to \$30,000 to fix each complaint and, to be

CAROLINE JAMES

really conservative, I would say 20 per cent of all building work has faults."

Registered builders are compelled to have domestic building insurance policies in place to cover homeowners.

Confusingly, homeowners can claim against these policies only "for defective or incomplete work as a last resort when the builder is dead, insolvent or has disappeared", the Building Commission's website states.

Finance minister Tim Holdring said more than three-quarters of customers were highly satisfied with their experience with builders.

"The Government is implementing a series of changes including on-site dispute resolution and strengthening the powers of the Building Practitioners Board to minimise the cost and inconvenience of building disputes," he said.

TALES OF WOE



Fed up: Georgio De Nola has a house riddled with flaws. Picture: NORM OORLOFF

HOMEOWNER: GEORGIO DE NOLA

SUBURB: Caroline Springs.

ESTIMATED BUILD TIME: One year.

ACTUAL BUILD TIME: 22 months and defects are still present.

FAULTS: Include holes in walls, unstable balcony balustrade, water damage.

ESTIMATED COST OF REPAIRS: \$70,000.

PRESENT STATUS: Building faults began appearing before completion, but the homeowners could not seek compensation until the builder went out of business three years later. Repair works, paid for by insurer, are continuing.

HOMEOWNER: PHOTINI PELLETIER

SUBURB: Plenty.

ESTIMATED BUILD TIME: Told it would take seven months from mid-June 2008.

ACTUAL BUILD TIME: 10 months from eventual start date in October 2008.

FAULTS: Include no ceiling insulation, broken doors, flooding garage, leaky downlights.

ESTIMATED COST OF REPAIRS: \$50,000.

PRESENT STATUS: In the past week the builder inspected the property for the first time since the home owners gave him a list of defects in November. He told Ms Pelletier his office would "be in contact" next week.

HOMEOWNER: JOHN*

SUBURB: Craigieburn.

ESTIMATED BUILD TIME: 270 days.

ACTUAL BUILD TIME: Nine months and counting — expected to take more than 12 months.

FAULTS: Include sections of insulation missing, smashed glass in the front window, overhanging brickwork.

ESTIMATED COST OF REPAIRS: \$18,000.

PRESENT STATUS: John has been sent four invoices for work that has not been completed. He has agreed to give the builder "one last chance" to repair the home before pursuing legal action.

* Name changed to protect identity.