



VCMLA Newsletter

Issue 9

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Welcome to Edition 9 of our Newsletter of the Victorian Construction Materials Laboratory Association, for the New Year 2009/10.

It has been some time since our last one and it is our intention to provide up to four issues of the newsletter per year and I would like to ask any of our members for feedback on issues and any articles of interest and discussion topics.

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Message from the President:

The industry is buoyant at the moment with all labs keeping very busy by all accounts. The government has invested in construction projects which should see our sector continue well into 2010. With winter upon us and the construction industry rarely stopping to allow lab staff a period to catch up on basic house keeping, I would like to raise the issue of in-house calibrations. What is the true cost to keep a lab in check? How much time do we need to find on a monthly basis to keep control of equipment. Are we happy with all things calibration / checks? It takes a concerted effort from a team of staff and real dedication to maintain your records in top shape. Are labs out there doing these checks or are they just filling in the records. With recent discussion topics on poor field testing practices are calibrations also suffering. This all comes back to the same issues of how much are we being paid for our testing. Rates in the market are still so low it's hard to understand how companies can make a dollar from the testing to be able to cover the cost of calibrations let alone the administration costs of running a business. Testing labs need to understand nobody really wins when your rates are lower than what they were 15 years ago, so why is it continuing. Let's make an effort to push rates up on major road

projects. Lets make an effort to retain staff in the industry so in ten years we have technicians with ten years experience and not one in each company and the rest all 1 – 3 year technicians. Let be proud to say we are geo- technical para professionals with skills in great demand and high ethical standards and lets not accept pressure from contractors. Road authorities around the country have lost faith in the testing industry and we need to correct this, we need to spell out the reasons and find solutions. If there is one time in your busy lives to find time to put some energy back into the industry, it's now. Make sure you attend the upcoming forum and lets work together to get back to the way things were in the 1990's. Passionate, skilled, dedicated, ethical and most of all, happy doing what we do.

Industry News:

What will be the future for the laboratories in our industry, and I am referring specifically to the changes in respect to the NATA Policy covering the new status of signatories. The policy was introduced from 1st July 2009 and will affect our labs. Following any discussions (your editor must declare his membership of the CMT AAC) or concerns then letters to the President would no doubt be appreciated, but please read the policy thoroughly.

Your editor has recently attended a lab forum organised by the RTA in Sydney, which was also had NATA representation. One aspect was that the RTA had undertaken a more thorough review of the recent Inter-Lab CBR testing, with some very surprising conclusions. Your editor will contact the RTA for permission to publish some of their review and have it posted onto the VCMLA web site.

It also seems that the issues raised in our last edition are sadly still with us, such as losing staff, pressures from site supervisors and commercial tight delivery timeframes.

During March of this year our association successfully organised a training session on the operation, background and general education on the testing for Atterberg Limits (AS 1289.3 series). As a follow on the association is looking at arranging a similar session on establishing how our labs report Soil Classifications to AS 1726.

NATA & VicRoads Training courses:

Members should also avail themselves of the latest series of training courses offered by NATA and VicRoads which are to be found on their web sites

CE009 Committee 2009

The status and operation of Standards Australia has, due to the current Global Financial Crises, been changed in respect of how Standards are controlled and updated. There will no doubt be some angst initially until the 'dust settles', but the VCMLA does have a seat at the table in the guise of our President - Ernie Gmehling, contact details

(Ph 0401 924 205 or email: ernie.gmehling@optusnet.com.au) feel free at any time to contact him or to your editor regarding your concerns about a current test method.

A reminder of - how the review process works (from edition 4):

Before a standard is released for use, it goes through a rigorous process of discussion, dissection and review. Each method is updated typically every five to ten years and is sent out for public comment.

Always remember that if we do not offer any comments we may have to live with the standard for up to 10 years.

SRA Updates

VicRoads has recently updated 2 codes of practice

RC 500.00 – Source Rock

RC 500.02 – Registration of crushed rock mix designs

Industry Interest & Trivia:

It is hoped to place in this section a number of items of an ad hoc nature (feel free to send in your items).

When your editor started his career in a state government soils laboratory things were very strict, and I dare say many of our more senior techs would be able to relate to my memories. We know now that there are more pressures out there but a tidy lab is safe, efficient and pleasant to work in but how many of you would like to see the return of this:



Technicians at work in original Soils Laboratory

VCMLA Loan Test Sieves

This process has continued to be used by many of our members and is to be expanded to include a set of gauges for use in calibrating 'punched plate' sieves.

Remember our offer to members:

It is now a NATA requirement (as of 1 January 2008) that all labs accredited for Particle Size analysis comply with new requirements of calibration on plate and wire woven sieves. Just to remind you the VCMLA committee has purchased a complete set of 2.36mm down to 75um sieves for this purpose to be loaned out to its members for a small fee. The cost per use is \$ 50.00 and is based on the collection and return to Ground

Science at Factory 11, (8-20) Brock Street Thomastown. Upon collection a conditions report will be completed by both the receiving party and the dispatch person. The same process will occur upon return. If the condition of the sieves is unacceptable a clean charge of \$15.00 will be incurred. If a sieve is damaged the cost of replacement may be born by the loan company depending on the age of the sieve. It must be emphasised that the loan period is for one week only to allow all members the opportunity to use them.

VCMLA Committee news:

Ernie Gmehling – Chairman

Tom Seymour – Vice Chairman

Alastair Catton – Secretary

Dom Meadley – Treasurer

Bob Body – committee member (Newsletter)

Michael de Meglio – committee member (Assist Newsletter)

Following our AGM a new committee has been constituted and is up and running with our first meeting arranged at the ‘Burvale Hotel’

The committee has recognized that our system of membership renewal has been poor, with fee’s failing due but members not being told. We will be sending out notices in the future, along with introduction packs to new members. The committee is working on another training workshop for soil classifications, so keep your eyes out. The VCMLA is currently financial and we are looking to hold a social event for members, hopefully later in the year. Its difficult for the committee as we are all busy and give our time free, so please support us when we organize an event and contribute with info, letters, discussion topics by sending them in to our editor for inclusion in newsletters.

AIMS OF THE ASSOCIATION (*a reminder*)

The aims of the Association are to:

- Improve the standard of testing in Victoria through training and other means
- Advance the status of testing laboratories to the construction industry
- Communicate changes in standards and technology to the laboratory industry
- Provide a code of ethics by which members operate
- Represent the views of the Victorian testing laboratories to peak bodies such as NATA, Standards Australia, Austroads, etc.
- Inform the construction industry of the benefits of good laboratory services
- Assist members in the development of suitable proficiency and inter-laboratory testing programs
- Conduct activities such as meetings, conferences, technical and social events for the benefit of its members