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Alastair Catton gave details of the findings from a VicRoads sub- committee that he has been a part of for the past eighteen months. His presentation is detailed in this edition with further updates to be detailed in the VCMLA Newsletter later in the year.

The CE009 Australian Standards committee, on which I represent the VCMLA, has asked if a number of the test methods from the AS 1289 series require updating. This information was sent out to our members and unfortunately received a poor response. Please remember this is an opportunity for you to have your say on whether or not a standard needs updating. Approximately 15 standards are up for consideration and I have nominated approximately half of these to go under review on the advice from a few members. Please take the time to review these standards when issued in draft form in the near future. Once issued its likely to be another 10 years before changes can be made again.

**Ernie Gmehling**  
**Chairman**

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

In May of this year the VCMLA held its annual AGM meeting. We were fortunate enough for Vtech Australia to allow us to hold the meeting at their new construction materials equipment showroom in Bundoora. Where possible please support Neil as he is a great supporter of our association and has been happy to provide specials to our members.

The meeting was well supported and several of our past committee has signed up again to keep the association going, with some fresh injection to the committee with the appointment of Peter Young. Peter will be our new newsletter editor so if you have any issues you wish to raise in this forum please send letters or articles to Peter.

The 2011–2012 committee consists of the following people.

- Ernie Gmehling
- Dom Meadley
- Tom Seymour
- Peter Young

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Many of you will have noticed that the VCMLA Newsletter has been absent for awhile. For this we apologise and hope that the next few issues will help make amends. This is my first time in the role of Editor and I am looking forward to hearing from members about their exploits and views. As with all journeys there is an element of trepidation and eagerness at what you might find and learn along the way. I invite you to join me in exploring the diversity and challenges presented by the construction materials testing industry. We would like your feedback on matters relating to the construction industry and in particular the construction materials testing industry. Drop me a line via e-mail [petery@labsmartservices.com.au](mailto:petery@labsmartservices.com.au).

### INDUSTRY FORUM UPDATE

*The following is a summary of a presentation given by Alastair Catton, Senior Specialist Geotechnician - Chadwicks T & T Pty Ltd at the VCMLA annual general meeting on May 17 2011.*

About two and half years ago issues were raised by Vic Roads regarding the quality of contractor materials testing on their road and bridge projects.

These issues included:

- Quality and frequency of material testing by VicRoads contractors of earthworks, pavement materials and structural elements
- Lack of technical knowledge and understanding regarding testing
- Surveillance / auditing within the industry
- Lack of knowledge amongst VicRoads staff regarding material testing principles, requirements and surveillance
- Method of procuring testing services
- Pressures on testing companies from head contractors to undertake testing at low prices

A small group of people within VicRoads from Major Projects, Technical Consulting and Regional Services worked together to identify actions to address these issues and risks. One of these was to hold a forum involving VicRoads, contractors, testing and quarry industries to enable open discussion on these issues. A forum was held in September 2009, organised by VCMLA, CCF & Vic Roads. Following the forum letters were sent out to industry bodies seeking representatives to join a working group to help forge a way forward.

The Working Group held its first meeting in April 2010, chaired by Lance Midgley, Vic Roads - Regional Director-Western Region. The attendees consisted of Vic Roads Project & Technical Consulting staff, representatives from the ACA (Ross Baker), CCAA (Tom Kovacs, Callum Wheeler) and from VCMLA (Tom Seymour, Alastair Catton). The Vic Roads audit team are not directly involved.

The agenda for that first meeting was to agree on the “inferred” problems with material testing, and how to improve performance. The key points raised were:

- Lack of technical training within our industry
- Explore the idea of a prequalification system, similar systems are in place in Qld & NSW
- Relationships between the laboratories, main contractors, VicRoads and VicRoads surveillance & auditing.

Some of the major outcomes so far are the issue of a VicRoads Technical Note TN106 – Surveillance of Field Density Testing. This technical note is currently only in a draft form. It is aimed mainly at VicRoads audit staff to enable them to have an idea how we carry out our bread & butter work. It will also be a good training tool for all new staff to the industry.

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Training has been a big talking point, and as a result NATA have been invited to attend the working group meetings. NATA provided details of courses offered by Hunter TAFE, but my personal opinion is that the course being offered by Swinburne is more appropriate and personal. An outcome from the last working group meeting was that Vic Roads & NATA were to meet with Swinburne, but I don't know if this has happened yet.

VicRoads are also introducing into their contracts a clause on the introduction of the competency requirements of NATA's Policy Circular 26. You will need to be aware of this if quoting on a job, because from experience we as testers rarely, if ever, get a sight of the contract and specifications we will be quoting on. The most contentious issue being explored at the moment is that of a prequalification option. To this end a consultant has been engaged to consider all avenues.

Personally I feel the testing industry at the moment are pawns 'hired and fired' by the contractors for various reasons, mostly in regards to the delivery of reports and cost. If a prequalification scheme was introduced testing companies might have some degree of stability, training would improve and so would staff retention. Once we have more qualified and long term employed staff, we should then be in a position to expect to achieve better test rates.

Other actions proposed, but not yet ratified, is to include the testing company at the initial and regular meetings held between VicRoads and the contractors, for new projects. This would mean that once a contractor has been awarded a project, the testing company would be employed before the project commences, rather than after, whereas at the moment they can "trial" various companies before engaging one.

Discussions are also taking place as to whether or not testers get paid by the contractor, or by VicRoads under a contract payment scheme.

I trust that this has provided some insight as to what is happening behind the scenes. What I have learnt is that Vic Roads moves very slowly, at least on issues like this, and I can't see any major changes to the way we carry out our business on VicRoads contracts happening for at least another year or two. However if Vic Roads changes their policies local councils usually also adopt those changes. Something to think about.

*I am the same as thousands around me but yet I am unique. I do not stand out in a crowd but I am important.*



*Civilizations have had a need for me for thousands of years.*

**What am I?** (Answer at Editors Corner)

### Vtech Materials Testing Equipment Pty Ltd

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### DOWN TO EARTH

*Interview with Norm Fieldew, Director, GTS Pty Ltd.*

#### **How did you start in construction materials testing?**

I started in 1967 as a soil technician testing concrete in the Civil Engineering Department at the School of Mines at that time located in McCray Street, Bendigo. The soil laboratory was involved in soil structure and hydraulics and was the first section to move out to the current site in 1968. It became accreditation for concrete in 1969. Later sampling was added and then soil tests and it grew from there. At this time I also helped prepare pracs for the students.

I was trained as a fitter and turner. There was no training back then. It was a case of picking up the standard and training yourself. I have enjoyed the interaction you get with people and the diversity of projects. Where I am now was never my intention but here I am. It's been a good 42 years

John and I took over the soil laboratory from the Latrobe University ten years ago in 2001 to form GTS (Geotechnical Testing Services). We have expanded quickly, which while not necessarily desirable; you just have to deal with it. John is the go getter and much of the success is down to him. I am more conservative in my approach. A good balance.

#### **What do you like most about what you do?**

The variation in work around testing soil and concrete as well as the diversity of projects. You come across so many interesting people. When the kids were young and we were driving somewhere they got sick of me pointing out the different projects that I was involved in. Certainly there is a lot of satisfaction in what I have helped achieve.



#### **What do you think the biggest challenge facing the industry is?**

Staffing. Training staff without a doubt. I think NATA's Policy Circular 26 in relation to approved signatories presents some real issues, particular to those laboratories in the country. It is hard enough to get staff now, trying to recruit staff that meet the new requirements presents real issues. 2013 is going to be an interesting time. I heard someone say that provided that any staff member that leaves, retires or dies gives him 3 years notice he will be fine. So training, recruiting staff and retaining staff are going to be a challenge for us. We have a number of laboratories all with staff doing there cert 3 or 4. I am not sure they will be completed by 2013 and what happens then is unclear. I imagine I am not the only laboratory in this position.

It is a concern that you can train staff to this new level that is required, and then have others offer more money who may not have put any of the effort into training, only then to lose them. That is a real concern I have. I have heard of another laboratory where salaries have already dramatically increased with the intent of keeping their people. I believe this is going to be a significant issue. It's not there at the moment but it is going to be.

#### **What is your favourite test area?**

I love concrete. My background is concrete. It's where I started. When John and I started together I handled the concrete and John handled the other side of it including the drilling. It's such a challenge with concrete, sometimes you can't explain why it does what it does. If I could explain all the things that happen I would

be sitting in Collins Street working one day a week. Concrete is a very, very interesting product from the things that can be done with it to the way it has changed over the years, with the precast techniques and the panelling techniques. It has been used in many cases as a cost cutting factor replacing brick laying costs, many many things can be done with it.

Recently we have had a new light weight product that actually floated in its mould in water. We're getting a density of about 500 kg per metre where as concrete is about 3,000 kg. We are not sure what they're doing with it at the moment but it's one of the interesting things when these products come along. We have so many additives today so it's no longer so many shovels of this and so many shovels of that with a bit of cement and water, it's far more technical. I've just found concrete very interesting.

### **What advice would give anyone starting in CMT today?**

To go as far as they want too, it's entirely up to them. The opportunities are there. Gaining a range of experience is important.

### **What is the best thing that can happen in CMT?**

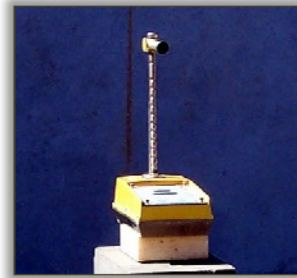
That prices go up. That we start getting back to what jobs are really worth. Anyone who has been in the industry for any length of time will tell you what the charges were 20 years ago and today we are doing them for half that price. Some things have improved and you can do things better but not that much.

### **Is there anything you would change about yourself?**

Retire!! No I've been very lucky, very fortunate in my life. I've never had to say gee I've got to go to work today, that's from the university times till now but of course you get a bit tired with age and you slow down. No there's nothing I would change except to maybe get out into our own lab earlier but that really wasn't an option early on.

### **What do you do to unwind?**

I play pacman. That's my therapy. When I'm at home I get in my den and play pacman. We get away quite often. Visiting the other GTS labs is part of my job and my wife tends to come with me. So it gives me a break, seeing how the others are going and what they are doing.



### **Radiation Safety Training**

*NDMG training courses and exams conducted by RadSmart are to be held at VicRoads, East Burwood on 12 August and 11 November, 2011. Enquiries and bookings can be made on 02 9520 6340*

**Victorian  
Construction  
Materials  
Laboratories  
Association.**

Contact details on the web  
[www.vcmla.asn.au](http://www.vcmla.asn.au)



### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The VCMLA annual general meeting (AGM) was held on 17 May 2011 at Vtech's offices with around a dozen members present. Prior to the annual general meeting Alastair Catton gave a presentation detailing progress since the industry forum that was held in 2009. The committee extends its thanks to Vtech for providing the venue for the annual general meeting. The following members were elected to the steering committee.

<i>Chairman:</i>	Ernie Gmehling
<i>Vice Chairman / Secretary:</i>	Vacant
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Dom Meadley
<i>Committee Members:</i>	Tom Seymour, Peter Young

The current committee on behalf of its members extends its thanks to both past and retiring committee members for their great support.

### NEW NATA PUBLICATION

NATA issued a new publication in July. Technical Note #32, Use of Nuclear Gauges for Testing Soil and Asphalt provides an overview to the operation of Nuclear Gauges. It includes the checks of nuclear gauges that need to be performed as well as providing example worksheets. It can be downloaded from the NATA website using the following link:

[NATA Technical Note 32](#)

### VTECH STILL GROWING



Vtech was established in 2009 by Neil Hunt who saw the demand for good quality testing equipment. Prior to the 2011 AGM meeting Neil gave a brief overview of the equipment he and his team have available for the construction materials testing market. Vtech have recently been appointed as a distributor for Troxler nuclear gauges. Neil also generously offered discounts for those members present on the night.

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### NEWS UPDATE

#### *AGTA Conference 2011*

The AGTA conference will bring together people from all over Australia who are connected to the construction materials testing industry. The conference promises to explore not only what is happening in the industry but also where the industry is heading. It will be held in Brisbane over 3 days commencing from 12 October. Further details can be obtained from the AGTA website [agta.org.au](http://agta.org.au).

#### *NATA*

NATA is restructuring its accreditation activities. A number of existing fields will be grouped together to form a sector. The present fields of CMT, NDT and Mechanical will be linked to form the Infrastructure Sector. It is expected that in time Client Managers will look after specific groups of clients rather than the present field based operation. Further details are expected in the September issue on NATA NEWS.



*Next time you're out driving and complain about the state of the roads spare a thought for those using this African road!*

### EDITORS CORNER

#### *VCMLA Newsletter*

The VCMLA Newsletter is published on a quarterly basis (four issues per year) Please note that the views expressed in the VCMLA Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of the VCMLA.

#### *Editor contact details*

The Editor can be contacted on 5436 1019 or e-mail [petery@labsmartservices.com.au](mailto:petery@labsmartservices.com.au)

#### *Articles needed*

If you have an article you feel would be of interest to our members or if the writing bug has got to you then send your contribution into the editor. Either fax or e-mail your contribution to the VCMLA Newsletter to the editor.

#### *Advertising*

Advertising in the Newsletter is encouraged. Fee is \$50 per half page. Further enquiries can be directed to the Editor.

#### *Buy & Sell*

Do you have any used testing equipment, building material or a relocatable building? If you believe that a laboratory might be interested in what you have to offer then drop the editor a line to have it advertised for free in the next issue of VCMLA Newsletter.

#### *Do you have an interesting photo?*

If you come across an interesting or funny photo relating to the construction industry I would be very pleased to hear from you. Please forward your photo to the editor for inclusion in VCMLA Newsletter.

#### *What am I?*

A stone. Did you get it correct? Congratulations if you did. If you have a 'What am I' with a construction materials flavour please send it to the editor.