



VCMLA Newsletter

Issue 6

PO Box 310 Kilsyth, Victoria 3137
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1 May 2009

Annual General Meeting

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The VCMLA needs your support.

As an organization we rely on the support of our members to attend functions, participate in meetings, contribute with ideas and of course to join the committee and offer your selfless service to better the industry.

If you believe being a member of the VCMLA is worthwhile, why not help us make the organization better by providing more information, direction, events and support to our members. Several of the current committee may not be continuing on and we need some fresh energy.

Please complete the expression of interest set out below and come along to the AGM.

When: Thursday 27 May 2009

Where: Vic Roads office 7 lakeside Drive, Burwood East, VIC

Time: 5.30pm

Drinks & nibbles afterwards

Guest speakers: Doug Dick – Geopave

Doug will talk on the status of the industry

Phillip McGlashen – Swinburne Tafe TBC

The VCMLA has been asked to contribute to the review and improvement of the National course : Laboratory Operations Certificate ii, ii, and iv. Phillip may talk about how we need to go about it and assist us in having a voice on the input.

TEST IN DISCUSSION

Atterberg limits training review

Future workshop suggestions

- Soil classification
- Emerson dispersion

The VCMLA conducted an Atterberg training work shop in March 2009 to assist our members with not only theoretic skills on why we perform the test, but a practical hands on skill session.

The training day was attended by 10 technicians from six different companies with each attendee receiving a certificate of completion.

Lunch included a huge selection of subway sandwiches which was far too much for all of us as we had several technicians withdraw at the last minute.

We had some technicians that had never performed the test through to technicians that had performed at least ten tests. All attendees found the workshop very helpful and offered suggestions on other workshops to consider in the future.

It was a little surprising to see some of the tools technicians were using to mix the paste, from short stiff knives to wide long blades that were very difficult to control. Ernie Gmehling showed the trainees how to make use of two tools at the same time using a painter's scrapper (wide face) with a traditional mixing tool. The wide scrapper was used to keep the paste central on the plate while the other tool turned the material over and smeared the soil on the plate.

Tom raised the issue of returning to the washed method of preparing crushed rock PI's to obtain all of the fines adhering to the rock particles. He said authorities were considering having the method placed back in the standard after it was withdrawn some ten to fifteen years ago. Dom Meadley provided some of the historical background of the test and what applications the tests are used for.

I would like to thank both Tom and Dom for offering their valuable time free of charge to conduct this workshop. I'm sure all who attended appreciated their Knowledge and involvement.



- Regards *Ernie Gmehling*



VIC ROADS TESTING CONTRACTS

I have often wondered whether we will ever get back to performing a six lot test on subgrade soils for \$500.00 / lot, the cheapest rate to win a Vic Roads contract back in 1992.

It seems strange with the increases in fuel and cost of living not to mention wages how prices have not gone up, rather than down. It seems not only have prices gone down but so has the skill level, ethical behaviour, and delivery of a geotechnical testing service in the industry. The question has been asked in many circles, "what has gone wrong"? I would like to offer my personal opinion (and not that of the association) and would like to hear your comments to the question. Send me an email or drop me a line.

The most obvious is training and competition but I believe there is more to it than that.

In the last ten to twelve years Victoria has built some of the largest road projects the state has ever seen. It probably started with the Western Ring road at Ardeer and in more recent times Eastlink. These projects required huge levels of staffing with labs doubling and tripling their numbers just to cope with the testing demands from the road project alone, not taking into account being able to service their smaller clients. What sort of stress does this place on the testing company and the technicians? How can you train technicians in such a short time to be competent skilled testers – the answer is you can't. This is where the problems start. Where can you find skilled technicians to triple your staffing levels – you might find one or two who might leave from another company but if there are two or three major projects going on and everyone is hanging onto their staff what then. Mediocre starts to set in. Acceptance of things that should not be accepted or tolerated occur. The lab becomes a machine, a factory of mass production.

Technicians work damn hard day in and day out. The pile of samples coming in the door never seems to get smaller- it starts to grow. The pile of samples to be tested gets bigger and bigger. More pressure is placed on the technicians from supervisors, management and contractors. Technicians begin to burn out, it's no longer fun anymore, it's a grind. Short cuts occur, staffs get fed up and leave and management has to replace them. Where do you find skilled staff – you don't, you grab whoever you can and start to teach them. When do you have time to train them, maybe a day if your lucky, they are thrown in with the lions.

A field technician has had enough and resigns, what now, oh Johnny has been out with Jimmy once or twice, he can cope. What does he really know, maybe he knows how to push the buttons. What do the numbers really mean. A wet density of 2.43 t/m³ on clay, five days later when the compactions done, the contractor is told he achieved 121% compaction. Is it really Jimmy's fault? What's the answer?

It's simple; don't create the monster in the first place. Only stuff enough donuts in your mouth that you can chew. Make the testing contracts in parcels that can be safely managed. If three geotechnical labs are running small parcels, the quality is there, the turnaround times are there, the skills base of the technicians grows, we do not loose the two year experienced technician to the printing industry or the golf course green keepers. The industry retains the skills base. How many technicians in Victoria have fifteen years experience, not many I would suggest. I envisage in the last 25 years, 500 kids have started out as technicians and maybe 10 are still in the game. Its sad really. Who is to blame?

That's my say, got an opinion lets hear it.

Regards

Ernie Gmehling

VCMLA Committee drawing board.

Your current committee

Ernie Gmehling – chairman
Dom Meadley – Secretary
Mal Talbot – Treasurer
Geoff Hughes – committee member
Bob Body – committee member
Tom Seymour – committee member

Yes I am interested in joining the committee

Name:

Contact details:

Interested position:

Fax to Ernie Gmehling 9464 4618

Interested in;

- Membership
- Training
- Events
- Newsletter
- Web site