



Green professionals

IN THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, ENVIRON HAS SHOWCASED MUCH OF THE GREAT SUSTAINABILITY WORK ACHIEVED BY ARCHITECTS AND BUILDING DESIGNERS. WARREN McLAREN TURNS THE SPOTLIGHT ON SOME LESS WELL KNOWN ECO-PRACTITIONERS.

● Back in 2000, the Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia (MPMSAA) initiated a project that would become an international program known as GreenPlumbers. Since those early days the program has trained well over 6,000 plumbers and plumbing staff from about 3,700 businesses in the plumbing game.

This training has evolved to cover five nationally accredited modules known as Climate care; Caring for our water; Solar hot water; Water efficient technology; and Inspections and reports. Where a plumber has completed all five modules, the firm

employing him or her may market themselves as a licensed GreenPlumbers Business and they are included in a national register of such enterprises. This registry can be accessed by consumers online simply by typing in their postcode and up pops a contact list of accredited GreenPlumbers in their area, showing the modules they have completed. A phone hotline is also available.

For 2008 an additional five modules have been added: Principles of natural wastewater design and treatment; Commercial hot water; Principles of pumps; Principles in urban irrigation; and

Principles in cooling tower water monitoring and efficiency.

Such has been the success of this program that it has been exported to New Zealand and the United States. In the US the idea has been taken up by the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors of California (PHCC), which has as its ambition to train in the next decade 15,000 green plumbers in California and 40,000 nationally.

Recently this explosion of growth in the GreenPlumbers program attracted the interest of a new Australian start-up company, Green Invest, which marries an

environmental commodities brokerage Nextgen, with the GreenPlumbers' ability to generate trade worthy renewable energy credits from installing solar hot water systems. Other trade industries have noticed the benefits that the plumbing industry has accrued from this initiative and set about developing similar schemes in their own sector.

National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) has its Victorian Chapter, with support from the state government's Sustainability Victoria, which developed the EcoSmart Electricians program. Its course comprises four

compulsory modules: Energy Management; Lighting; Pumps, Fans and Motors; and Solar, Heating and Cooling. Like the GreenPlumbers, EcoSmart Electricians can, on completion of the course, promote their extra skills with the designated industry accreditation. Initially trialled in Victoria and NSW in mid 2007, the program is now spreading nationally where it is administered by state chapters of the NECA.

The accreditation, which is being registered on the Australian National Training Information Service (NTIS), remains valid for two years, after which recertification is required to ensure electricians have maintained their knowledge and currency in the appropriate areas. Where businesses employ a predetermined number of EcoSmart accredited electricians, the contractor may for an annual fee of \$300, promote itself as being part of the scheme. Although not yet having the online search function of GreenPlumbers, it is possible to submit details on the program's website and have them email out a list of EcoSmart Electricians in a given region.

GreenPainters is not a program of the Master Painters Association, although it is an associate member of the industry body. Rather it is an independent non-profit association that was set up to facilitate environmental best practice for the painting and decorating sector. Whilst not being a direct industry leader program, GreenPainters does have affiliations with other relevant bodies. It is an Ecospecifier industry partner and a Business Sustainability Mentor (providing guidance and advice to participants about sustainability issues under the Victorian government's Grow Me the Money project).

More modest than the previously mentioned green professional programs, the GreenPainters Association nevertheless has lofty ambitions. For example, it is working on a pilot nationally accredited training scheme. At this time, however, members of the association voluntarily subscribe to a set of green work practices in order for their businesses to be listed online as green painters. These practices include the use of products that meet the Green Star guidelines or are certified by Good Environmental Choice Australia or the European Ecolabel, plus they recycle wastewater and advise clients on the



(Image courtesy of GreenPainters)

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options for non-toxic, low VOC paints and finishes.

The GreenPainters only recently celebrated its first birthday, having formed in mid 2007, so it would be unfair to expect it to be as fully developed as other more established groups. It takes some time to smooth out the wrinkles in training and accreditation programs. One of the mature schemes in the country is still evolving, 15 years on.

Back in 1993, the then Solar Energy Industry Association set up its Renewable Energy Industry Accreditation to ensure a standard of competence in the design and installation of renewable energy systems. A rapidly changing industry has seen myriad association name changes and corresponding tweaks to the accreditation.

These days the Australian Business Council for Sustainable Energy (BOSE) has a comprehensive accreditation program that requires practitioners to be qualified electricians who have also completed about 60 hours of a course called Grid Connect Design and Install (SET056). This course can be undertaken with a

registered training organisation and recognised prior learning credits are possible for experienced installers. Installers are required to submit a portfolio of case studies alongside their application form and an \$880 fee to hold the BOSE accreditation for two years. Hybrid, wind and micro-hydro endorsements are available to fully accredited members.

Yet another industry reshuffle, in late 2007, the Business Council for Sustainable Energy amalgamated with the Australian Wind Energy Industry Association (Auswind) to form the Clean Energy Council, whose membership of over 300 businesses is considered to be responsible for 25 per cent of Australia's total electricity production.

Another practitioner development program that benefits from a well established body is the GreenSmart Professional, which is administered by the Housing Industry Association (HIA). The HIA is Australia's largest residential building organisation, representing a broad swath of building professionals: trade contractors, builders, suppliers, product

manufacturers, etc. In its 2007 annual report of the GreenSmart program, the HIA indicated that around 3,500 members had received training and accreditation under the scheme. In 2008, it was expecting to deliver extra courses, such as one on renovation and material selection. The HIA believes that becoming a GreenSmart Professional assists housing businesses to “understand what you can include in your next home design to meet your customer’s expectations with regards to sustainable building and living”.

Guidance notes are available to better assist members apply the GreenSmart guidelines in the areas of passive design, water efficiency, choosing materials, energy efficiency, site management and government rebates. Consumers can find their local accredited GreenSmart Professional by selecting their general geographical area from a pull-down menu on the HIA website. Up pops a list with names, companies, locations, phone numbers and email addresses. Though with only 10 regions for the whole country, a consumer might have to click through a few pages before they find a professional in their own town or suburb.

HIA's general manager of GreenSmart, Janine Nachwatal, is of the view that: “Young tradespeople just starting out now who decide to become GreenSmart professionals will be giving themselves an advantage that will not only last throughout their careers, but will become increasingly valuable as time goes on. It's just good sense.”

The branding of the program has been extended to also cover accreditation not just of builders and designers, but also the houses they construct. Last year there were nearly 500 GreenSmart houses listed, alongside numerous estates, developments and display villages.

It might be expected that with so many green smarts invested in the residential housing market, there would not be room for other professional development programs. But the Master Builders Green Living program shows this is not necessarily so. Based in Victoria, the key strength of its program, in the words of Master Builders executive director, Brian Welch, is that “it enables residential builders to outline a range of environmentally friendly options with clients to incorporate into developments in a practical and easy format”.

The aim of Green Living training is said