



MEDIA RELEASE

29 April 2016

ARMA DEMANDS GOVERNMENT ACTION ON 8 HOUR CERTIFICATE II COURSES & “QUICKIE” CERT III TRADE QUALIFICATIONS

Australian Refrigeration Mechanics Association (ARMA) CEO Kim Limburg says she is pleased the Australia Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is finally targeting fast tracked VET courses but more needs to be done.

“Refrigeration and air conditioning tradespeople are being pushed out of their specialised roles and forced to work in unsafe environments as a direct result of the short courses offered by non-registered organisations in the refrigeration & air conditioning sector”. Ms Limburg said.

In January 2016 on behalf of ARMA members, Ms Limburg wrote to the Minister for the Environment, The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham and ASQA, including a petition signed by over 1,000 members urging government to abolish the 7 week part time Cert III course in Refrigeration & Air Conditioning.

Sadly little has been done by government in response to this petition.

“In recent months ASQA has received numerous complaints by ARMA members regarding these short courses and their negative impacts on both industry and consumers. ASQA’s responses have fallen very short of ARMA members expectations”, Ms Limburg said.

Ms Limburg has been a strong advocate for the refrigeration industry tradespeople for over 10 years, lobbying government about the dangers imposed on Australian consumers by the short-cut courses and their adverse impact on properly trained trade-qualified air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanics.

“In 2005 as Minister for Environment, the now Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull established Arctick, as a mechanism to implement environmental licences and contracted the Australian Refrigeration Council (ARC) as its regulator. At the time Mr Turnbull promised to establish a National Industry Board, but to date has failed to make good on his promise” Ms Limburg said.

“Government and ARC continue to allow these short courses to continue, extending into peripheral trades”.

The majority of split system air conditioners are installed by electricians and plumbers, who have completed the abbreviated Certificate II, air conditioning split system course and also the Certificate III refrigeration course via a Recognition of Prior Learning process.

These courses can be completed in as little as 8 hours, as opposed to the four year apprenticeship needed to be undertaken by trade qualified refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics.



The graduates of these quickie courses are often so unfamiliar with trade-level air-conditioning and refrigeration competencies that it is not unusual for trade qualified air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanics to be called out to fix their work.

On attendance at these jobs, ARMA members and their trade qualified colleagues have seen incorrect repairs, including unsafe or misdiagnosed wiring, and poor workmanship.

They have also seen oversized or undersized systems installed, unnecessarily increasing power consumption and defeating the purpose of star ratings, which is used by many consumers to decide which air conditioning unit to purchase.

“This is a disgraceful situation and must be stopped. Australians deserve better than to waste their hard earned money by under-trained operators incorrectly installing and then illegally repairing their air-conditioning and refrigeration units, promising warranties they can’t provide”, Ms Limburg said.

According to Ms Limburg, apart from the dangers and poor workmanship these courses impose on consumers, they have had a devastating impact on properly trained trade-qualified air-conditioning tradespeople, many having had to close their businesses.

As well apprenticeships enrolments have dropped from approximately 1000 to 800 during the past year with potential apprentices opting for the short split systems course to make quick money.

“The membership of ARC consists predominantly of large commercial, synthetic refrigerant supporters invited by government to represent industry and advise on government working groups”, Ms Limburg said.

“The problem is that they have self-elected to represent the air conditioning and refrigeration industry to the detriment of trade qualified air conditioning and refrigeration mechanics, consumers and the environment”.

“Since the establishment of Arctick a decade ago tradespeople have not had the opportunity to have their say at the highest representative levels, natural refrigerant groups have only recently been invited to participate in working groups but representation of tradespeople continues to be excluded”.

“In fact during its first 10 years, although ARC’s CEO and 2IC held no refrigeration and air conditioning qualification the 2IC was empowered to assess all the quickie short courses and RPL processes”.

““In order to protect Australian consumers, we must retain the specialist knowledge essential to ensure the sustainability of Australia’s specialist air-conditioning and refrigeration industry” Ms Limburg said.

“Accordingly, ARMA calls upon the Prime Minister to disband ARC and establish the National industry board he promised in 2005 but has failed to deliver.”

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