



Perth's exploding Pro-fit water pipes: Who's to blame? What next?



By [Anne Gibson](#)

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Fletcher Building chief executive Ross Taylor has [blamed Perth's exploding water pipe problems](#) on poor installation and workmanship but Western Australia's building and plumbing regulator ruled out those causes in an interim report. So when will we know who is to blame for [problems with Pro-fit water pipes](#) made by Fletcher's Iplex Australia? Will Fletcher be liable to pay for repairs? Analysts most fear a total recall and have [pondered how much this could cost](#). Some people say \$700m to \$800 million. Fletcher has so far made \$15m available to help people. Two official investigations into the problems are under way in Australia. The first is from Western Australia's building and plumbing regulator which last year probed the causes of Pro-fit polybutylene pipe failures. Most leaks occurred in pipes made between mid-2017 and mid-2022, the regulator said. Building and Energy - part of the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety - inspected more than 50 properties where pipe failures occurred, saying in a preliminary report that "installation work practices and workmanship were not the cause of the pipe failures". But they haven't said what the causes were or released the full report yet. Following that announcement last year dismissing poor installation or workmanship, a second investigation was launched. Another division of that same government department asked for cases where people had been injured. Consumer Protection of the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety asked for cases where people had been hurt. That probe has now nearly concluded. Submissions had to be in by February 7. That was by the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety for the Western Australian Government. The person in charge is Commerce Minister Sue Ellery. The department asked about injuries, particularly where people had been hospitalised or received treatment.

 Government of Western Australia Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety Consumer Protection	
Fair Trading Act 2010 (WA)	NOTICE
Failure to comply with this Notice is an offence under section 88(1) of the Fair Trading Act 2010 with a maximum penalty of \$10,000.	
To	BGC Residential Pty Ltd
Address	67 Walters Drive, Osborne Park WA 6017
Investigation or inquiry that is being carried out	See Annexure A to this Notice.
Requirement	You are required under section 69 of the <i>Fair Trading Act 2010</i> to: Give the information and produce the documents specified in Annexure B to this Notice.
...	
 Government of Western Australia Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety Consumer Protection	
ANNEXURE B	
SECTION 69 OF THE FAIR TRADING ACT 2010 (WA)	
NOTICE TO PRODUCE DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION	
The following is required to assist in establishing whether there are grounds to facilitate a product recall in relation to the Iplex polybutylene 1 pipe manufactured using the Typlex-1050 polymer (PB-1 pipe), pursuant to section 122 of the Australian Consumer Law:	
...	
8.	The particulars of any injuries reported relating directly to the water leak, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the date of the injury, b. location at the property, c. victim's: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. name, ii. age, iii. gender, iv. contact telephone number, v. contact email address, vi. body injury location, vii. injury sustained, and viii. whether hospitalised;

A notice to Perth builder BGC about Iplex pipes.

A little background: Perth house pipes run through ceilings, unlike many in new homes in this country which are in concrete slabs and underfloor. So when water pipes leak in Perth, they can cause huge damage to homes, forcing residents out while repairs are conducted. The department called for cases of injuries caused by pipe problems. Perth homes' ceilings collapsed and water entered switchboards, electrical switches and light sockets. Findings might not be out for a few weeks, with Jarden's Grant Swanepoel picking March as the most likely date for the next update. A senior investigator with the department's consumer protection division, which is undertaking the investigation, explained why the probe was under way. "Consumer Protection has received a large number of responses ranging from damage to water leaking through electrical fittings." "We are in the process of going through all the information received, which will be included in our assessment report and will be contacting some homeowners over the next couple of weeks to seek witness statements." Information was to establish "whether there are grounds to facilitate a product recall in relation to the Iplex polybutylene 1 pipe manufactured using the Tplex-1050 polymer (PB-1 pipe)".



Perth, where hundreds of homes' water pipes have leaked. These pipes were mainly installed from 2017 to 2022.

Regardless of who's to blame, many Perth homeowners are suffering. "Mental health abolished," said one victim of the Iplex Polybutylene Support/Possible Class Action Group which has 2400 members. "Anxiety, stress, paranoia. Investing life savings and knowing any minute, anytime your roof, your life could cave in," said another group member. Fletcher went into a [trading halt last year](#) over the pipe issue and established a \$15m fund while causes, resolution and industry solutions were developed, Taylor saying Fletcher was committed to helping the industry resolve issues. The department's Consumer Protection division also issued a notice to Perth's BGC Residential and other builders calling for details about who was hurt and how. That asked for particulars of injuries, reported and relating directly to the water leak including the date of injury and location of the property. A Fletcher Building spokesman said this month about half the \$15m fund Fletcher had devoted to consumers affected had been spent. The company knows of no injuries. "We've received no reports of any injuries and won't comment on the regulator's investigation," he said of Consumer Protection's now-concluded probe.

Sam Gray, general manager of strategy and commercial of builders BGC in Perth, said 2600 bursts had occurred in 1352 homes in his city. He knew of "hundreds" of complaints about leaks in Iplex pipes. BGC [estimated the pipe issue](#) would cost Fletcher at least \$750m. People were being "zapped" when water and electricity combined and lives were in danger, he said. It cost around A\$60,000 to put new water pipes in the Perth homes affected, Gray said. But Taylor blamed:

- Over-bending of pipes where elbows were required if pipes were bent at certain angles;
- Inadequate movement allowed for, where a pipe was fixed in the wall through rigid mortar;
- Poor and at times non-existent lagging or wrapping;
- Damage and workmanship issues, with pipes bent across metal nails and kinked, causing stress points.

[Fletcher's half-year result](#) for the six months to December 31, 2023 will be announced on Wednesday, February 14. **Anne Gibson has been the *Herald's* property editor for 24 years, has won many awards, written books and covered property extensively here and overseas.**