F.A.T. MAG

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2026

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Sticking point

Making apprenticeships more attractive to reduce dropouts

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The husband-and-wife team providing premium steel products

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Protecting workers from heat-related health hazards as temperatures rise

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GOING FOR GOLD

Through competitive events to help them develop world-class skills, WorldSkills Australia gives young tradies such WA bricklayer Jason Seiler a pathway to pursue excellence

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New HAFF stream fast tracks 1000 homes



PHOTO: ASGRAPHICSB24 -123RF

Housing Australia has opened a new funding stream under Round 3 of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) to accelerate the delivery of social and affordable housing through shovel-ready, low-density projects.

Stream 5 will prioritise up to 1000 well-located Class 1 homes—detached and semi-detached dwellings—delivered in packages of 200. To qualify, projects must hold planning approval by February 2027 and start construction by May 2027, with expressions of interest opening on 14 September.

The announcement followed advocacy from Master Builders Australia, which had warned that low-rise volume builders and tradies were missing out on opportunities under the existing funding arrangements. MBA chief executive Denita Wawn welcomed the commitment and urged that it be rolled out efficiently and with transparency around delivery.

The Urban Development Institute of Australia also backed the move, saying it supported greater diversity in housing types and a better balance between higher-density infill and high-demand, lower-density housing. ◘

Find out more: masterbuilders.com.au

Lending slump sparks investment strike warning

Master Builders Australia (MBA) has warned of an "investment strike" in the residential sector after ABS figures showed a sharp decline in home lending following May's Federal Budget.

The number of loans used to acquire homes fell 6.4 per cent in the June quarter, driven by an 11.4 per cent drop in loans to housing investors, while owner-occupier loans fell 2.9 per cent.

MBA chief executive Denita Wawn said the Federal Government's policy settings were resulting in fewer homes and construction jobs, and called for the proposed trust changes to be amended through a carve-out or grandfathering for existing small businesses, alongside accelerated depreciation and an increased instant asset write-off.

MBA chief economist Shane Garrett said the figures probably masked the true extent of the disruption, as the quarter included several weeks before the budget was handed down. Independent modelling of the budget's impact points to 8700 fewer new homes, rents rising $9 a week and 3800 construction jobs lost over four years. ◘

Find out more: masterbuilders.com.au

Regulators target solar sector over fall risks

WorkSafe Victoria has put the state's solar sector on notice over falls from height as installation activity grows.

The crackdown, announced on 26 August, has been backed by a run of prosecutions. On 4 September, a solar installation company was convicted and fined a total of $100,000 after repeatedly failing to address fall risks at four residential homes, while in August an electrical company was fined $40,000 after ordering an apprentice to work on a roof without fall protection.

The enforcement push comes amid heightened attention on falls in Victoria. On 24 August, a plumbing company and a hire equipment provider were convicted and fined a combined $630,000 after a worker died while operating an elevated work platform at a North Blackburn construction site. ◘

Find out more: worksafe.vic.gov.au/news

NEWS



Construction costs keep climbing

Construction costs are continuing to escalate while productivity flatlines, according to Master Builders Australia's reading of the latest ABS national accounts.

The June quarter data showed GDP rose 0.4 per cent, with the ABS reporting that construction continued to experience price rises due to ongoing competition for limited labour and materials.

MBA chief executive Denita Wawn said the findings reflected what builders had been consistently telling government, with labour shortages blowing out and industry costs now more than 50 per cent higher than just before the pandemic. With building materials inflation at a three-year high, she called for action to support local manufacturing by addressing domestic input costs and to remove unnecessary barriers to high-quality, compliant products from overseas.

"Without action, pressure will continue to build on builders, homeowners and renters alike," Wawn said. ◘

Find out more: masterbuilders.com.au

PHOTO: PHOTOVS - 123RF

Another tax, fewer homes

The Housing Industry Association has lodged its submission to Treasury's consultation on the proposed minimum tax on discretionary trusts, warning it is at odds with the Federal Government's promise to tackle the housing shortage.

HIA managing director Jocelyn Martin said discretionary trusts were not an exotic tax vehicle but one of the most common structures for family-owned building businesses, allowing couples to run a business together, bring adult children in as successors and manage fluctuating workloads and income.

Martin noted that Treasury's own consultation paper acknowledged the proposal would increase compliance costs, require businesses to restructure and create additional complexity. HIA's submission calls on Treasury to publish a full assessment of the economic cost—including legal, accounting, valuation and administrative costs, and state stamp duty triggered by restructuring—and to release the behavioural assumptions behind its revenue estimates.

"Australia doesn't have a tax collection problem. It has a housing supply problem," Martin said.

Find out more: hia.com.au/

Green light for 700 Sydney social homes

Almost 700 new social and affordable homes are on the way for Sydney after five Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) projects received planning approval, in a joint push by the Federal and NSW governments.

The projects—at Caringbah (164 homes), Belmore (145), Punchbowl (114), Hillsdale (179) and Pagewood (224, including 84 social homes)—will almost quadruple the number of dwellings previously on the sites, with more than 80 per cent of the new homes social and affordable.

Homes NSW is delivering the developments in partnership with community housing providers, with BaptistCare building and managing the Caringbah and Belmore projects and Link Wentworth taking on Punchbowl. Traders In Purple will deliver Pagewood and Coplex will deliver Hillsdale.

Demolition on all five sites is expected to begin before the end of the year, with construction due to start in mid-2027. The projects should support around 2000 construction jobs.

NSW housing minister Rose Jackson said the government was "getting on with the job of building more homes". ◘

Find out more: nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases

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One of 37 Skillaroos selected by WorldSkills Australia to represent the country in Shanghai.

Aiming high

WorldSkills Australia gives young tradies a pathway to pursue excellence. CEO Trevor Schwenke explains how grassroots competition can lead to international opportunities and build stronger skills across Australian industry. By Shane Conroy

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

WorldSkills Australia provides an opportunity for young tradies to reach beyond competency and pursue excellence beyond the required industry standard.

"WorldSkills gives young people the opportunity to say, 'I actually want to be better than competent'," says Worldskills Australia CEO Trevor Schwenke. "We want to encourage our young people to pursue excellence and to believe they can be the best in the world in their chosen field."

WorldSkills Australia uses regional, national, and international competitive events to help participants develop world-class skills. It operates across 34 regions throughout Australia and connects apprentices, trainees and students with trainers, employers and industry experts. Competitors can advance from regional events to the National Championships, and even be selected in Team Australia to compete in international events.

The 48th WorldSkills Competition, for example, brought more than 1400 young people from over 70 countries and regions to Shanghai from 22 to 27 September 2026. They contested 64 skills across construction, manufacturing, technology, hospitality and service industries.

WorldSkills Australia selected 37 Skillaroos to represent the country in Shanghai. The team included bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, tilers, electricians,

"WORLDSKILLS GIVES YOUNG PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY, 'I ACTUALLY WANT TO BE BETTER THAN COMPETENT.' WE WANT TO ENCOURAGE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO PURSUE EXCELLENCE AND TO BELIEVE THEY CAN BE THE BEST IN THE WORLD IN THEIR CHOSEN FIELD."
TREVOR SCHWENKE, CEO, WORLDSKILLS AUSTRALIA





and competitors from many other fields. Each reached Shanghai through years of training, competition and support from employers, educators and industry mentors.

FROM REGIONAL COMPETITION TO TEAM AUSTRALIA

Schwenke describes a three-phase cycle of regional events, National Championships and international competition.

In regional events, participants typically compete in a six-hour, industry-relevant challenge. Judges assess the work against set criteria, then award gold, silver and bronze medals.

High-performing regional competitors can progress to the three-day National Championships, which bring together around 700 competitors across dozens of trades and skills.

WorldSkills Australia then invites suitable competitors into its national training squad. Selection considers results, age eligibility, attitude and commitment, and can extend beyond National gold medallists to find the right representative.

"It is a 12-month haul for our Skillaroos to get to Shanghai," Schwenke says. "It takes a lot of commitment, dedication and hard work

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

"BRICKLAYING FOLLOWS A UNIVERSAL RULE. IT IS ESSENTIALLY ONE BRICK ON TOP OF ANOTHER. BUT EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN WAY OF DOING IT. THAT DOES NOT JUST VARY BETWEEN COUNTRIES. EVEN ACROSS AUSTRALIA, BRICKLAYERS USE DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES. SOMEONE SHOWS YOU THE ROPES, THEN YOU MAKE IT YOUR OWN."
JASON SEILER, WA BRICKLAYER

Western Australian bricklayer Jason Seiler (pictured) was selected in the Skillaroos squad for the 48th WorldSkills Competition in Shanghai after he won a regional gold medal and earned a Certificate of Excellence at the 2025 Nationals.







to get to an international event."

PREPARING FOR WORLD COMPETITION

Selection in the national team is the beginning of a year of technical and personal development. WorldSkills Australia appoints an industry expert for each international skill, and the experts' relationship with their appointed Skillaroo often becomes a close, year-long technical mentorship.

Experts work with their mentee to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and create a training plan. Experts may also connect Skillaroos with local specialists in equipment, processes or techniques.

Western Australian bricklayer Jason Seiler was selected in the Skillaroos squad for the 48th WorldSkills Competition in Shanghai after he won a regional gold medal and earned a Certificate of Excellence at the 2025 Nationals.

"Bricklaying follows a universal rule. It is essentially one brick on top of another," he says. "But everyone has their own way of doing it. That does not just vary between countries. Even across Australia, bricklayers use different techniques. Someone shows you the ropes, then you make it your own. But there is always something you can improve."

Seiler worked with expert Andrew Hosking and local trainer Wayne Sutherland to prepare for Shanghai, and competed in Taiwan, Hangzhou and Wollongong in the lead-up. Practice in China familiarised him with local bricks and mortar.

"On one project in China, I built a dragon-themed wall that spelled out 'China'," Seiler says. "Competition gives you the chance to work on more complex and intricate projects than you would normally encounter onsite."

SHANGHAI BOUND

That training prepared Seiler for 22 hours of competition across three and a half days in Shanghai. And he has gold in his sights.

"I'm looking forward to that final chance to compete on a world-class stage," he says. "What is anyone's goal when they compete? They want to go for gold. That's what I've worked for. If I give it 110 per cent, I'm confident I can win a medal."

But Schwenke measures success beyond medals. He says the international pathway develops Skillaroos personally and professionally, and can open careers in industry, training and overseas work.

"The Skillaroos are well sought after when they finish competing," he says. "What they have learned over that period of time can set them up for fantastic careers."

Seiler already sees the value of his experiences with WorldSkills Australia onsite. At 20, he feels ready to work as a foreman and teach others. He eventually wants to run a bricklaying business, build a team and encourage more young people to enter the trade.

"The level of quality and speed I've gained through WorldSkills will serve me for the rest of my bricklaying career," he says. ◘

Tow away zone

All States Trailer Spares is a company that prioritises quality in both their service and their trailer parts. By Frank Leggett

Back in 1998, Peter Hilton undertook a dramatic career change to start All States Trailer Spares (ASTSS). At the time he was a pastor in a ministry with a wife and young family. Money was tight, particularly with the medical bills associated with his wife's MS, so he had a side hustle in trailer hire. The difficulty in finding trailer spare parts inspired him to take out a credit card with a $5000 limit and start ASTSS, running it out of a shed the size of a house garage.

Today ASTSS is located in Wyong, NSW, on a couple of hectares of land, operating out of a 4800-square-metre building with 28 staff members. The business has had 28 years of reliable service and constant growth. Even though Peter has taken a step back from the frontline, he's still involved with ASTSS while his two daughters have taken over the helm. Sheree Robartson, with a background in graphic design, marketing and leadership, looks after the operations and culture at the business. Genette Hilton is the CEO.

"We wholesale and manufacture trailer parts, and distribute them all over Australia," Genette says. "We custom design boat trailers but a large portion of our business is assembled axles. We're committed to being fully- or over-compliant to Australian standards. While we import some components, we also manufacture many parts in-house. We assemble all our axles to strict tolerances and torque settings. We've positioned the business so ASTSS can look after anything you tow up to 4.5 tonnes."

ASTSS wholesales and manufactures trailer parts to the highest Australian standards, and distributes them all over the country.



28 GREAT YEARS

Celebrating 28 years of business—and still going strong—Genette attributes their success to two simple elements.

"To the best of our ability, we ensure we have a full complement of stock," she says. "Everything we need is always on hand. We also provide a rapid turnaround. If we get an order today, we'll usually get it out the door today. We are the fastest in the industry."

Genette has a background in construction management and has worked in New Zealand, the UK and Europe. She specialised in glass facades on buildings but always knew she would come home and join the family business.

"Coming from the construction industry with construction management experience was a huge advantage when I joined ASTSS," she says. "The first thing I did was improve the safety of the site and ensure our team was operating efficiently. Learning on the job was intense but rewarding. It rapidly expanded my skill set."

Genette also credits the team at ASTSS for the continued success of the business. When a customer needs something, they do whatever is needed to make it happen. Recently, a customer in Singleton, 110 kilometres away, needed a specific part urgently. One of the ASTSS team just jumped in

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED



From left: Sheree Robartson, Peter Hilton, and Genette Hilton

a car and drove it up there.

"A win for a customer is a win for us," Genette says. "Our willingness to bend over backwards to achieve a result is what sets us apart."

LOUD AND PROUD

While ASTSS mostly deals with original equipment manufacturers that make trailers for customers, they also have customers in the automotive, hardware and retail industries across Australia. As their network of retailers and distributors covers the entire country, fast delivery is a priority.

"We rely on our courier companies and have built a great relationship with them," Genette says. "Our delivery partners work alongside us to get products delivered in reasonable times. Fortunately, customers in remote locations understand that it's going to take longer for products to arrive."

With a large range of retail products, ASTSS uses bright red packaging for a reason.

"It's vibrant and stands out," Genette says. "It sits on a shelf, loud and proud, making it easy for customers to find. I'm proud of our branding. Being a CSS member also gives ASTSS better buying power. Everything is working in unity."

ESSENTIAL MAINTENANCE

ASTSS is a successful and growing business. Their products are high quality, often exceeding Australian standards, and with more than 20,000 axles spun each year, it's responsible for keeping a lot of trailers on the road. The next challenge is educating customers and end users on safety and the correct way to look after their trailers.

"Many trailer owners will have a trailer sit in their backyard for a year," Genette says. "Then, one day, they'll attach it to their car and drive 110 kilometres per hour down the highway. This is a recipe for a catastrophic accident. Even if they do check their bearings, they might go and purchase an inferior product.

"At ASTSS, you're buying a reputable brand from a company you can trust. That's the message we want to get out there—look after what you've got and buy from a reputable source. At the end of the day, we all want to get home safely. All of us at ASTSS take that very seriously." ◘

Bailing out

Australia is struggling to turn massive demand for apprentices into a deep enough pool of qualified workers, with a large proportion of young people failing to complete their training. By Cameron Cooper

The high rate of apprentice dropouts is a personal issue for Simon Croft.

The chief executive, industry & policy at Housing Industry Association (HIA)—the nation's peak residential building industry association—is a former carpenter who completed his apprenticeship in the early 2000s. His son is now a qualified landscaper after also starting a carpentry apprenticeship.

So, Croft is a true believer in the system, but he knows Australia needs to turn around an alarming apprentice dropout rate as the nation rolls out infrastructure for projects such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Western Sydney International Airport and the National Housing Accord. "Workers have the chance to be part of a lasting legacy," he says.

However, the latest numbers highlight a problem—with figures from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) showing that just 58.7 per cent of trade apprenticeships that started in 2019 were completed within six years.

Croft says it is time to highlight the long-term career prospects for apprentices. In his case, he graduated from being an apprentice to taking on industry training and regulatory jobs to his currebt position.

Yet he still recalls people questioning his decision as a young man to become an apprentice. "They'd say, 'Oh, why are you wanting to do a trade? You're quite intelligent.' I still hold that as something of a chip on my shoulder and it's part of why I'm striving to tell people about how many opportunities you can get through doing a trade in this country."

WHY ARE APPRENTICES QUITTING?

NCVER reveals that more than a quarter of trade non-completers cite dissatisfaction with pay, working conditions or the workplace as their main reason for leaving, while one in five point to personal reasons. Some also leave for a better job, or another apprenticeship.

Gary Workman, executive director of the Apprenticeship Employment Network, the peak industry body for group training organisations in VIC, says low wages are a big contributor to the high dropout rate of first-year apprentices who fall under the award rate system, while the impact of workplace bullying cannot be ignored.

"With bullying, the culture of the construction sector does need to improve," he says. "There can be an old-fashioned culture in the sector and apprentices are more vulnerable. It's usually their first job, they're a lot younger than their peers and they're getting used to a workplace. These sorts of things can fester unless you address them."

More safeguards are required, Workman says, to ensure financial and regulatory standards are sufficient to ensure that apprentices are appropriately compensated and protected, and that employers are "doing it for the right reasons".

WHAT DOES IT COST BUSINESSES?

For small businesses, in particular, the dropout issue is problematic. After pouring time and resources into upskilling young workers, businesses often fail to get the benefits of bringing apprentices on as fulltime employees.

Workman says everyone loses if an apprentice quits, with the high attrition resulting in lost investment in recruitment and training, disrupted workforce planning and fewer qualified workers available to fill vacancies. "It's a lost opportunity if someone doesn't complete. Everyone's wasted their time and everyone's frustrated. And it makes it harder for the employer to go back to the well and start again."

A paper from the Global Apprenticeship Network Australia, a subsidiary of the Apprenticeship Employment Network, reveals the benefits of getting it right. For every $1 invested in an apprenticeship over a four-year period, employers can see a return of up to $1.40, while governments and the wider community benefit by up to $4.76.

However, it typically takes 1.6 to 2.6 years into a four-year apprenticeship for employers to see a financial return.

"The employer is certainly wearing all the cost and the risk upfront for the first 18 months to two years until the apprentice becomes more productive and skilled," Workman says. "There's a big expense with training—supervision costs, training costs, time off work. So, we would like to see governments invest more money in apprenticeships in the first year or two. And then everyone gets the reward at the end."

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

Employers can improve retention through better recruitment and job matching, structured mentoring, supportive supervisors, clearer training pathways and regular checks on workplace



"THE EMPLOYER IS CERTAINLY WEARING ALL THE COST AND THE RISK UPFRONT FOR THE FIRST 18 MONTHS TO TWO YEARS UNTIL THE APPRENTICE BECOMES MORE PRODUCTIVE AND SKILLED."
SIMON CROFT, HOUSING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

satisfaction.

The HIA endorses multifaceted actions, including:

- the creation of a national network of specialist Australian technical colleges for Year 10-12 students,
- a national Job Ready scheme to provide try-a-trade skills prior to entering into apprenticeship,
- financial incentives for employers to take on apprentices,
- a targeted program for recent school-leavers to promote taking on a trade, and
- introducing incentives that help bridge any wage shortfall for 'mature-aged apprentices' and their employers.

Croft believes a return to the successful model from the 1960-1990s of technical trade colleges would provide a different pathway for ambitious young Australians, fast-tracking them into high-skilled and well-paying jobs.

Workman adds that more emphasis on recruitment diversity, including women,



should be considered. “But whether we’re targeting Indigenous people, young women, or people from culturally diverse backgrounds, the construction sector is usually a new environment. So, we must make sure that we’re not setting them up to fail, that we’ve got the right systems and supports around them.”

CAREER PATHWAYS THE KEY

To meet the government’s target of building 1.2 million homes from 2024-29 under the National Housing Accord, an army of workers will be needed.

Croft believes more education is required to alert potential apprentices to roles beyond the big three—electrical, plumbing and carpentry. Other construction skills such as welding, industrial refrigeration, waterproofing, tiling, flooring and glazing are all in demand and can command a good wage or be the basis for a successful small business.

‘Wet’ trades such as bricklaying, concreting and roof tiling are “screaming out” for more workers. “We desperately need them and they’re well-paying careers,” Croft says.

He also reminds tradespeople that great career pathways exist for apprentices. “Don’t think of a trade as a single career. It opens doors to all sorts of roles.” ◘

“WITH BULLYING, THE CULTURE OF THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR DOES NEED TO IMPROVE. THERE CAN BE AN OLD-FASHIONED CULTURE IN THE SECTOR AND APPRENTICES ARE MORE VULNERABLE.”
GARY WORKMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, APPRENTICESHIP EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

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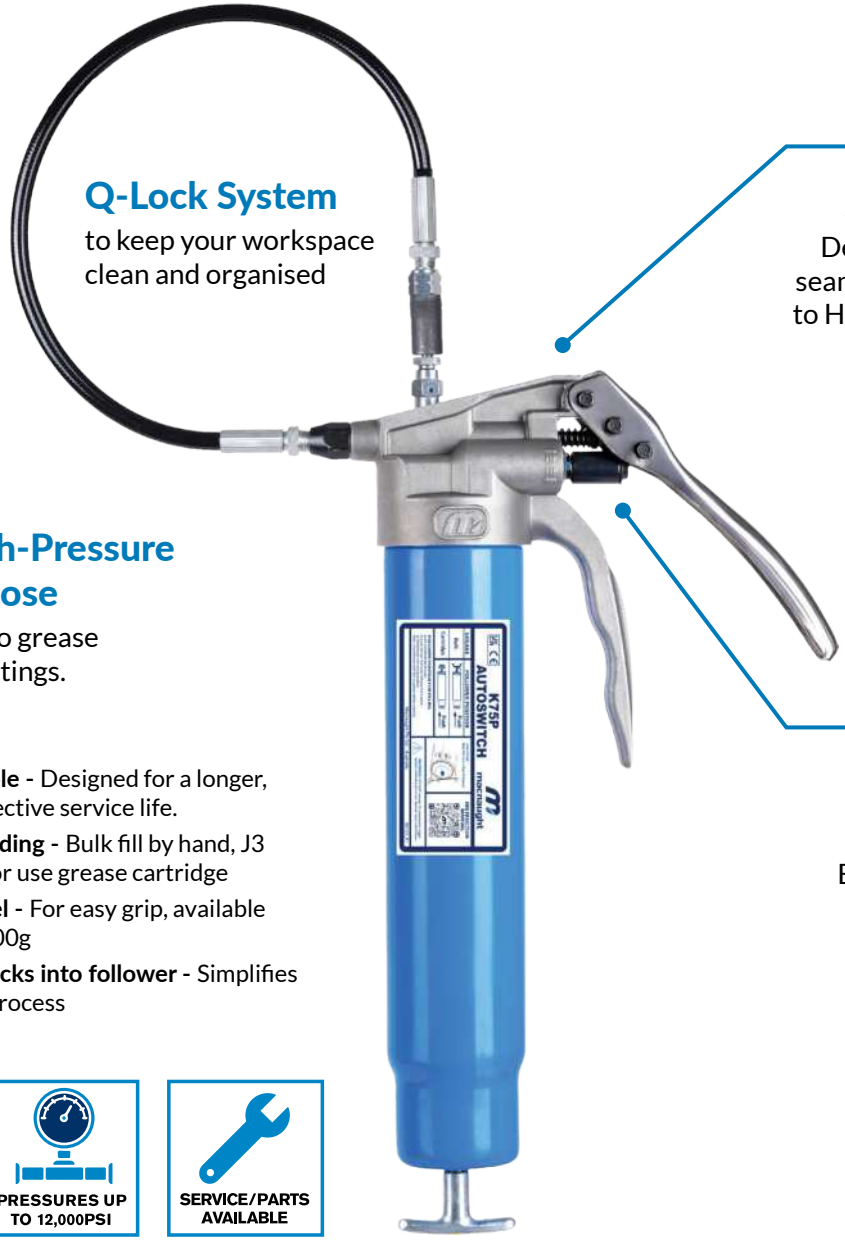
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Like magic

New augmented reality tech is helping tradespeople save time—but experts say many aren't quite ready to adopt it. By Rachel Smith

When you hear the words 'augmented reality', futuristic movies or headsets that beam you into other worlds perhaps come to mind. But construction sites?

"AR can make construction work easier by allowing a tradie to point a phone, tablet or headset at a work area and see digital information such as building elements, services or installation instructions overlaid on the site," says Biyanka Ekanayake, lecturer at the UTS School of Architecture and Built Environment.

However, a widening divide is emerging between larger construction companies embracing AR and smaller operators sticking to more traditional approaches. Because of this, software creators Sam Hepton and Julius Jeppe from Viewport XR, and Michael Reid from construction materials supplier Rock Stone have joined forces to create Measure and Quote LiDAR, which uses light detection and AR technology.



Just point a headset and voila!

At a basic level, the app can scan a space, get accurate linear or area measurements and speed up the quoting and buying process, says Jeppe.

"You're eliminating the need for pen, paper and tape measure because it can figure out exactly how much carpet or plasterboard sheets you need, and the cost."

But for trades who still use paper time sheets, carbon copy invoices and a physical tape measure, adoption has been slow.

"Those embracing the new tech are usually younger and they walk around all day with a phone in their hand," says Reid.

The AR being explored by large contractors is already quite impressive, says Ekanayake. "It can help workers coordinate structural and building services elements, check completed work against the design, document defects and progress and identify potential clashes before they lead to rework."

It can also improve situational awareness by displaying known services or required clearances before excavation, she adds. "However, its reliability depends on the quality of the underlying model, specifically its alignment with the site and the accuracy of the device—so it should support rather than replace safety procedures and professional judgement."

Investing in high level tech and training may be more realistic for commercial players at this stage, says Ekanayake. "Small scale contractors generally invest selectively, favouring tools with a clear and immediate return. Phones and tablets are probably the most realistic entry point because they're familiar hardware and can be introduced one workflow at a time."

Hepton says education is key for tradespeople who might be reluctant to try new tools. "There's the need to just get into the tech and learn how to do it—and these tools will get easier and cheaper and more accessible over time."

Room measurements, floor plans, creating scopes and quotations—and showing clients how proposed work may look—are all options with these apps.

Reid worked with some apprentices earlier this year and showed them the Measure and Quote LiDAR app, which requires an iPhone Pro.

"I said, 'Right, how will you measure this room to know how many square metres of products you'll need?' They said, 'Oh, tape measure, pen and paper.' There were two rooms to be measured up so I said, 'I tell you what—half of you go in this room, and half of us will go in the other.'"

In under 20 seconds, the app-using group had measurements such as

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED



AR and reality capture apps to try on the worksite

Measure app It's preloaded onto iPhones / iPads and can be a good starting point if you want to investigate the tech but not invest too much time or energy into it.

***Measure and Quote LiDAR* Point**, scan and calculate materials such as paint, plasterboard, cladding, carpet. **(https://apps.apple.com/au/app/measure-and-quote-lidar/id6478145534)**

Polycam 3D Scans and Floorplans Generate floorplans, record measurements, design visualisation, create 360 tours with shareable links. (https://poly.cam/)

Magicplan Provides phone-based scanning, floor plans, photographs and estimates within a single workflow. (https://magicplan.app/)

ToBeMaps View and share a 3D digital design (BIM) superimposed onto the real-world construction site. **(https://www.iddtech.com.au/products/tobemaps)**

height, length, square metres, lineal metres. "With the windows and doors cut out because the app does that by itself," adds Reid. "The other team took about 7-8 minutes because they had to work it out and add it up. They were all pretty amazed."

Hepton wishes all tradespeople would realise how powerful the phones in their pocket actually are.

"A few years ago, this tech wasn't anywhere near consumer grade and now it's becoming way more accurate and powerful. Ultimately, the right apps can really help you save time in your day-to-day work."

Jeppe and Hepton are excited about prospects.

"We make software but we're also a disruptive technology company; we like to be on that knife edge and play with all the new toys," says Jeppe.

"My prediction is that in 5-10 years' time wearables will be normal. People will use voice activated commands or hand gestures to quickly measure a floor, you'll use your voice to send off a quote. We already have some of that tech on our phones, but it'll also be on our face with AR/VR glasses."

Ekanayake agrees. "In 5-10 years, I'd expect AR to be less a standalone technology but rather increasingly embedded within the estimating and inspection applications that builders and tradies already use." ◘



Dead heat

Higher baseline temperatures and gaps in safety management mean more workers than ever face heat-related health hazards in the workplace. By Tracey Porter

A Belgian holiday worker engaged by a labour-hire contract business to pick pumpkins on a farm in Queensland likely believed sunburn was the biggest risk he faced while grafting under the summer sun.

But on just his second day on the job, with very little shade available, no safe work procedures in place and under pressure to continue picking and packing even after concerns were raised about the conditions, the backpacker began struggling with the heat.

Acting erratically before collapsing and convulsing then passing out, the worker was rushed to hospital where he was pronounced dead. The cause was later confirmed as multiple organ failure due to, or as a consequence of, heat stroke.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JPERAGINE - 123RF

HOT UNDER THE COLLAR

Tragically, the loss of a life under such conditions was far from an isolated incident.

SafeWork data shows that in the 12 years to 2013 (the latest available), there were 13 work-related fatalities in Australia from exposure to environmental heat. Of these, 12 occurred from outdoor work, one happened in an enclosed ceiling space and nearly half happened during the worker's first week on the job.

Coronial inquiries later identified a number of OHS failures on work sites where these fatalities occurred, including by colleagues to recognise the signs of heat-related illness, a lack of coordination between the parties responsible for worker safety, and a lack of education when it came to scheduling work around the hottest parts of the day or season.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 2.4 billion workers encounter excessive heat during their work each year, and that globally excessive heat is responsible for an estimated 22.8 million occupational injuries and 18,970 deaths.

In its 2024 landmark report, 'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate', the same organisation stated that WHS protections globally "have struggled to keep up with the evolving risks from climate change, resulting in worker mortality and morbidity".

According to SafeWork, the construction, manufacturing and agriculture sectors, alongside emergency services, are particularly vulnerable to exposing workers to heat-related illness. This is largely due to risk factors that include working in direct sun, strenuous physical activity and inadequate sun protection.

Not using appropriate PPE such as broad brimmed hats, legionnaire neck flaps, UV-blocking wrap-around sunglasses, and other cooling apparel that helps promotes the body's thermoregulation, was also identified as a key issue, as was unfamiliarity with employer responsibilities.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

But ignorance of the law is no defence when lives are at stake.

"THERE ARE OTHER FACTORS THAT CAN CAUSE HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS, SUCH AS HIGH HUMIDITY, HEAVY PPE OR LACK OF AIRFLOW. [LIKEWISE], ASSUMING ALL EMPLOYEES AND WORKERS HAVE THE SAME HEAT TOLERANCE SO IMPLEMENTING THE SAME CONTROLS FOR EVERYONE [AND NOT] CONSIDERING VULNERABLE WORKERS."
GAZELLE KALK, CONTENT AND TRAINING DIRECTOR, PENINSULA AUSTRALIA



In the case of the holiday worker, regulators charged the labour hire business with several WHS breaches and fined him $65,000. The farm's owner was also fined $100,000 over the incident.

Gazelle Kalk, content and training director of workplace health and safety consultancy Peninsula Australia, says with the country facing rising ambient temperatures and more intense heatwaves occurring more regularly, heat stress is increasingly being recognised as a significant workplace hazard. She argues this means it is more important than ever that Australian employers recognise and understand their legal obligations to manage extreme heat.

Under current legislation, namely Australia's Work Health and Safety Act and Victoria's Occupational Health and Safety Act, employers and persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) have a primary duty of care to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that employees and workers are not exposed to health and safety risks, including heat stress, Kalk says.

Employers and PCBUs also have a legal duty to consult with their employees and workers and other duty holders when they are directly affected by health and safety issues.

The law also states that employers and PCBUs must apply the risk management process to manage the risks of heat in the workplace.

"This process involves identifying heat hazards, assessing the risks of heat-related illness, applying the hierarchy of control measures, and regularly reviewing those controls to protect employees and workers in hot environments," Kalk states.

She notes a number of employers have only limited understanding of their WHS responsibilities, with many wrongly believing that providing drinking water fulfills their safety duty or that all employees have the same heat tolerance.

"There are other factors that can cause heat-related illness, such as high humidity, heavy PPE or lack of airflow," she says.

"[Likewise], assuming all employees and workers have the same heat tolerance so implementing the same controls for everyone [and not] considering vulnerable workers, for example, older workers and those with underlying medical conditions."

BE PREPARED

Heat risk depends on the individual, task, and environment.

Kalk says this is why all employers should ensure they have a robust heat stress management plan in place.

The best plans involve having clear written risk assessments, mandatory drinking stations, regular rest breaks in shaded or cooled areas, emergency response procedures for heat-related illness and training protocol for this procedure.

None of this has to affect the bottom line. Kalk says that leading employers understand that by implementing practical measures such as scheduling early shifts in the morning and finishing before peak temperatures occur, providing chilled water directly to workers in work areas, issuing lightweight clothing and PPE, and implementing appropriate work-rest schedules, they can reduce heat risk without impacting productivity. ◘

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED

"THIS [RISK MANAGEMENT] PROCESS INVOLVES IDENTIFYING HEAT HAZARDS, ASSESSING THE RISKS OF HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS, APPLYING THE HIERARCHY OF CONTROL MEASURES, AND REGULARLY REVIEWING THOSE CONTROLS TO PROTECT EMPLOYEES AND WORKERS IN HOT ENVIRONMENTS."
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Strong as steel

The husband-and-wife team at The 316 Fastening Shop supply building solutions to meet the demands of the harshest Australian conditions. By Kerryn Ramsey

The 316 Fastening Shop, located in Mona Vale on Sydney's Northern Beaches, recently had an unusual request from Tonga. A solar farm was unable to source wiring cables and brackets to hold their solar panels in place.

"We pride ourself on finding solutions to difficult problems," says Kim Montague, co-owner of the company with husband Paul. "They needed strong, long-lasting wiring to hold the panels in all sorts of weather conditions. We manufactured the wiring to their specifications and the solar farm is now up and running, producing clean energy."

GRADE 316

The 316 Fastening Shop specialises in providing premium stainless steel fastening products, glass balustrade systems, and thread repair solutions for customers across Australia and now, Tonga. They stock a range of marine hardware and building bracketry including post supports and joist hangers. They also carry a range of decking screws, wire balustrade components, and stainless steel fastenings in both metric and imperial sizes. Tools include drill bits, abrasives, hole saws and hand tools.

"Stainless steel comes in grades," Kim says. "Marine grade, which is weatherproof and salt resistant, is grade 316. That's why we called the company The 316 Fastening Shop. Originally, we were mainly dealing with marine businesses but the name stuck as we expanded."

Wire balustrading is a popular aspect of the business and The 316 Fastening Shop hires the tools and sells the products for a DIYer to undertake installation. They can also supply all the brackets and glass panels for glass pool fencing.

"We sell to a lot of builders and marine businesses on Sydney's Northern Beaches, but we also send products all over Australia," Kim says. "Our range of products is diverse and comprehensive so we're able to assist big companies and DIYers. We can generally supply products the next day. If we don't have something and need to source it from elsewhere, the customer will have it the day after that."

FAMILY AFFAIR

The 316 Fastening Shop was started by Paul Montague and his brother Tim in 2006 as a small shop that sold nuts and bolts. When Paul took over in 2008, he expanded into supplying the marine industry. Paul then started bringing in more building products and the business has continued to grow. Kim joined the company in 2016 and the couple's two sons, aged seven and nine, love 'helping out' by sorting nuts and bolts. Paul's mum Rebecca is the bookkeeper and the final member of the team is Rust, Paul and Kim's dog, who's in the shop every day.

"Paul was originally a shipwright building racing yachts while Tim was a machinist with the Australian Defence Industry," Kim says. "I was a journalist so it was quite a career change for me. I was working on a magazine three days a week and at The 316 Fastening Shop two days a week. While I was on maternity leave, the magazine closed so I pivoted to working full-time here and I've never looked back."

Running a busy company is made easier by being overseen by this husband-and-wife team.

"We know what the other is thinking

The 316 Fastening Shop specialises in providing premium stainless steel products for customers throughout Australia and beyond.



PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPPLIED



Paul and Kim Montague, owners of The 316 Fastening Shop

"316 MARINE GRADE STAINLESS STEEL IS HIGHLY RESISTANT TO SALT DAMAGE. WE'VE HAD CUSTOMERS COME TO US AFTER USING CHEAPER, INFERIOR PRODUCTS. IT'S BEEN A DISASTER AND NOW THEY WANT TO USE OUR PRODUCTS TO REPLACE EVERYTHING."
KIM MONTAGUE, CO-OWNER, THE 316 FASTENING SHOP

and can problem-solve together," Kim says. "We bounce off each other in a very positive way and know each other's strengths. We also made a simple lifestyle choice. Work stays at work. When we close the doors, nothing comes home with us. We don't even have computers at home to check emails."

QUALITY PRODUCTS

This three-person (and dog) operation is committed to finding solutions to any issues their customers have. They stock a huge range of stainless-steel products to cover the majority of situations but will bring in new products if needed. Being so close to the ocean, there's crossover between the marine and building industries.

"The building codes in Australia say that if you're within 10 kilometres of the coast, you should use stainless steel for building material such as bracketry," Kim says. "316 marine grade stainless steel is highly resistant to salt damage. We've had customers come to us after using cheaper, inferior products. It's been a disaster and now they want to use our products to replace everything."

ONLINE UPDATE

From the Northern Beaches to Australia-wide to Tonga, The 316 Fastening Shop has built a reputation of reliability and high-quality products.

Presently, they are looking at expanding their range even further to complement what they already do and further support the building industry.

"We made a great decision when we joined CSS," Kim says. "After speaking to a couple of members, we realised it was clearly beneficial to join. It has allowed us to bring in new products and meet new people. We've improved our buying power through a network of other members."

While the expansion of their range of products is continuing, the next goal is to improve their online capabilities.

"We want to make purchasing from us online as easy and simple as possible," Kim says. "It's all part of the commitment to our customers to find solutions to all problems." ◘



WES TO WEL: WHY NOW IS THE TIME TO RE-EVALUATE RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

For many Australian businesses, respiratory protection programs have remained largely unchanged for years. Workers are issued respirators, fit testing is completed, and daily tasks continue as usual. Where respiratory protection is required, it remains an important part of workplace control strategies, particularly when used alongside higher-order controls to help reduce worker exposure to airborne hazards.

A critical part of any respiratory protection program is selecting the right respirator and filter for the task. The selected respiratory protection must help reduce worker exposure to below the applicable exposure limit for the airborne contaminant present.

On 1 December 2026, Australia will formally transition from Workplace Exposure Standards (WES) to Workplace Exposure Limits (WEL). While this change may appear administrative, it may have practical implications for respiratory protection selection and workplace respiratory protection programs across construction, manufacturing, and industrial environments.

In many cases, the work being performed may not have changed. This makes it an important time for businesses to review their exposure assessments, existing controls, respirator selection processes, and overall respiratory protection programs.

A Change That Could Impact Existing Respiratory Protection

Exposure limits are designed to help protect workers from the health effects of airborne contaminants such as respirable crystalline silica, welding fumes, metal dusts, vapours, mists and other hazardous substances commonly encountered across construction, manufacturing and industrial workplaces.

As exposure limits are reviewed and updated, some businesses may find that respiratory protection previously considered adequate no longer provides the level of protection required under the new limits.

This does not automatically mean workers need different equipment. However, it does mean many organisations should review their respiratory protection programs and reassess whether current controls remain appropriate.

Looking Beyond the Respirator

One of the most common misconceptions is that respiratory protection is simply about selecting a filter and a facepiece. In reality, respirator selection is only one part of an effective respiratory protection program. The process should also consider:

- The airborne contaminant and exposure level
- The work activity being performed
- Task duration
- Environmental conditions
- Facial fit and compatibility with other PPE
- Worker comfort and acceptance
- Maintenance, cleaning and storage requirements

A respirator can only provide its intended level of protection when all these factors are considered together.

Why Re-Evaluation Matters

A respiratory protection review is often triggered by a workplace change such as a new process, new materials or a newly identified hazard.

The transition from WES to WEL creates another important reason to review existing programs.

For example, workplaces involved in concrete cutting, grinding, demolition, fabrication, welding or manufacturing may already have respiratory controls in place. However, if exposure limits have changed, businesses should consider whether the selected

respirator still provides the necessary protection factor for the application.

This is particularly important where exposure levels are close to regulatory limits or where workers are exposed to airborne contaminants for extended periods.

Worker Comfort Is Becoming Increasingly Important

As businesses review respiratory protection, comfort and wearability are becoming key considerations.

Workers are often required to wear respiratory protection for longer periods and in challenging environments. Equipment that is uncomfortable, interferes with communication, or creates excessive breathing resistance can impact compliance and productivity.

As a result, many organisations are taking a broader look at available respiratory protection options, including reusable respirators, powered air respirators and integrated systems that can help improve wearer comfort while maintaining protection.

The best solution will always depend on the specific application, hazard and workplace environment.

Expert Assessment Can Simplify the Process

For businesses already managing multiple safety obligations, understanding how regulatory changes impact respiratory protection can seem complex. The good news is that organisations do not have to navigate the process alone.

Respiratory protection specialists can assist with protection factor evaluation, respirator selection, fit testing guidance and broader program considerations, helping businesses understand whether existing arrangements remain suitable under the changing exposure landscape.

Preparing for the Future

The move from WES to WEL is ultimately about improving worker health outcomes. For employers, now is an ideal time to review existing respiratory protection programs, confirm that current solutions remain appropriate and identify opportunities to strengthen worker protection where required.

Sometimes the review confirms existing controls are working well. In other cases, it may highlight opportunities for improved fit testing, enhanced training, upgraded respiratory protection or alternative solutions better suited to the task.

The important step is starting the conversation before changes take effect. Respiratory protection is not a one-off decision. As workplace risks and exposure limits evolve, regular re-evaluation helps ensure workers remain protected both today and into the future. ◘

Click here or scan the QR Code to Download the White Paper. To read more about the changes, visit Safe Work Australia.



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HOLDING THE LINE



When accuracy, speed, and versatility matter, the new IMEX ELX4 Green Beam 4D Line Laser brings professional-grade layout capability into a compact, jobsite-ready package.

Designed for builders, carpenters, fit-out specialists, electricians, and other construction professionals, the ELX4 projects four 360° green laser planes, providing complete horizontal and vertical reference lines around the work area. This 4D configuration allows trades to establish multiple planes simultaneously, making everything from framing and cabinetry to ceilings, partitions, and services faster and easier to set out.

The highly visible green laser beam delivers excellent line visibility in demanding indoor environments, while the compact mini format makes the ELX4 easy to position, transport and use in confined spaces. Its 360° coverage means users can work from virtually any position without continually repositioning the instrument, helping improve both productivity and consistency on site.

The ELX4 combines fast setup, clear reference lines, and the flexibility to tackle multiple alignment tasks with a single tool. Whether levelling cabinetry, aligning walls, installing ceilings, or establishing accurate vertical references, the four-plane configuration provides a comprehensive visual reference across the workspace.

The ELX4 also reflects IMEX's focus on delivering professional measurement technology that is accessible to today's trades. Its compact footprint makes it suited to contractors who need serious capability without carrying a larger, more cumbersome laser between jobs.

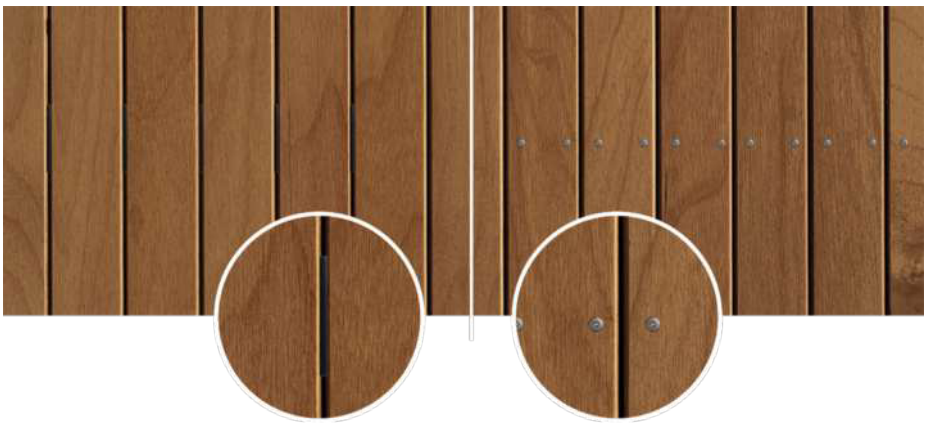
For trades demanding greater productivity without compromising precision, the IMEX ELX4 delivers visibility, versatility, and ease-of-use, making 4D laser technology a practical addition to the modern toolkit. ◘



PRESERVE YOUR DECK WITH DECK CLAW

Installing decks with visible fasteners can compromise the final look. Classic screw options disrupt the smooth exterior of decking boards and often limit post-installation touch-ups. AJ's Deck Claw is an investment in invisible fastening to protect the boards' natural appeal while providing a strong, durable, easy-to-install solution for premium decks. Firmly in place between decking boards, Deck Claw secures the planks as the screws are tightened into the underlying material. The built-in weathering clip locks over the top, covering the screws and protecting them from atmospheric corrosion. Deck Claw is engineered for:

- **Strength:** tested to CAT 4 cyclone areas to ensure endurance in extreme weather.
- **Durability:** stainless steel screws and high-quality plastic ensure long-term, reliable performance, including in coastal environments.
- **Consistency:** optimal drainage and expansion through uniform 5 mm gaps between boards.



- **Versatility:** suitable for standard square-edged Merbau and most Australian hardwoods without the need for pre-grooving.
- **Smoothness**: fastener-free finish enables easy sanding and polishing after installation.

Deck Claw streamlines deck construction with a simplified process that reduces labour time by up to 50%. Manufactured in Australia to support local industry, these products adhere to national quality standards and revolutionise deck building with concealed fastening. When dedicating time and resources into a dependable deck, a solution that can meet requirements while providing a clean and professional finish is more than worth the investment.

Hobson Engineering proudly distributes Deck Claw to support in constructing decks. ◘

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DEWALT POWERSHIFT DELIVERS CORDLESS POWER FOR HEAVY-DUTY JOBS

Cordless technology has steadily moved into more demanding applications, but for many professionals, limitations in runtime and sustained performance have kept petrol-powered equipment firmly in place. DEWALT POWERSHIFT is changing that — with a system designed not only around powerful tools, but around the battery platform that keeps them working harder for longer. Engineered for high performance and extended runtime, DEWALT POWERSHIFT addresses one of the biggest challenges on site: downtime. From refuelling delays to petrol equipment maintenance and inconsistent power delivery, these are everyday frustrations that impact productivity. POWERSHIFT is built to reduce those interruptions and keep jobs moving.



Runtime that works as hard as the crew

At the core of the DEWALT POWERSHIFT high-output battery platform is sustained power for demanding applications. This is not simply about delivering peak output — it is about maintaining that performance over longer periods, without compromise.

For applications such as repeated wet core drilling, consistency is critical. In these environments, battery reliability matters just as much as raw power. The ability to work longer without interruption can have a direct impact on productivity, particularly on jobs where stopping and starting costs valuable time, accuracy and momentum.



Moving beyond petrol

The move away from petrol-powered equipment is about more than convenience. It is about greater control, improved efficiency and a better jobsite experience. Battery systems like DEWALT POWERSHIFT remove the need for fuel storage, reduce maintenance demands and eliminate on-site emissions. For contractors and workshops, that means a cleaner, quieter and more predictable working environment. There is no warm-up time, no refuelling delay and fewer variables affecting performance. Just equipment that is ready when work starts and built to keep going.

It also means lower noise, no harmful emissions and reduced cost of ownership — benefits that are becoming increasingly important across jobsites.

Built for demanding conditions

Historically, heavy-duty cordless systems have struggled to match petrol alternatives in sustained, high-load applications. The latest generation of battery technology is closing that gap, delivering the runtime needed for repetitive, demanding tasks without constant battery changes or charging disruption. That is where the DEWALT POWERSHIFT system stands apart. It is not about a single tool or battery. It is a complete cordless equipment system designed to support continuous workflow across challenging jobsite conditions.

The bigger shift

As battery technology advances, expectations for cordless equipment are changing. Portability alone is no longer enough. Professionals need equipment that can deliver reliable performance over the full course of the job.

DEWALT POWERSHIFT reflects that shift. By focusing on runtime, consistency and jobsite efficiency, it represents a new generation of cordless solutions capable of replacing petrol across more heavy-duty applications.

Cutting the cord for good

For tradies and technicians, the real value of DEWALT POWERSHIFT is not just power — it is uptime. When every minute matters, equipment that can keep pace with the demands of the job is fast becoming essential. And that is exactly what DEWALT POWERSHIFT is built to deliver. ◘


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CCS: Complete Construction Supplies
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Coastal Steel & Fasteners
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CPT: Construction Product Technology
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Drayton Bolts & Fasteners
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Narellan, NSW

Ross's Diesel Service
Merredin, WA

Sydney Bolts & Fasteners
Rydalmere, NSW

Tamworth Tools & Fasteners
Tamworth, NSW

The Bolt Barn
Grafton, NSW
Lismore, NSW

The Tool Store
Kirrawee, NSW

TJ& H Agencies
Ottoway, SA

TwoWay Fasteners
Kings Park, NSW

Ultimate Fasteners
Shepparton, VIC
Wodonga, VIC

Urenco Supplies
Bayswater, WA

VIP Industrial Supplies
Welshpool, WA

Wasps Industrial Supplies
Mackay, QLD

Wattz Fasteners
Tuggerah, NSW

Young Industrial Supplies
Young, NSW

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the name behind the names.

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Notes to the consumer: Some products are subject to plus freight costs where applicable. Some items may not be stocked in all stores, but can be ordered as required. Prices are valid while stocks last and are subject to change without prior notice. CSS Pty Ltd reserves the right to correct printing errors and omissions. All items include GST.