

I note that this Royal Commission is to give consideration to the legal and best practice requirements for the assessment of buildings after an earthquake having regard to lessons from the Canterbury earthquakes.

With regard to this, I respectfully suggest that the Commission recommends a more formal process for organising earthquake induced structural collapse enquiries in the future, most particularly where loss of life occurs.

I am very aware of the casualties in the CTV building collapse and the hopes held by both relatives of the victims, and by the public at large, that something extremely positive results from this enquiry.

Whereas in the case of a road traffic fatality, or deaths in an aircraft accident, there is a clearly defined process for investigating the event starting – if I understand it correctly – as a police-controlled crime scene – no such procedures are mandated for a building collapse resulting in death.

Undoubtedly a better organised handling of the physical evidence resulting from the CTV building collapse would have greatly facilitated the subsequent enquiries.

Rescue and recovery activities clearly must have priority but need not be followed by the wholesale destruction of evidence as appears to have occurred in the clearance of the CTV site and dumping of debris at the Burwood landfill.

If competent observers had had the opportunity to identify and record elements of interest as the site was cleared – and if a rigorous chain of custody record had been instigated and maintained – it is very probable that many of the questions aired before this Commission could have been answered with greater confidence.

In summary, I hope that the Commission is able to encourage a much more competent forensic investigation of the structural collapse fatalities, that unfortunately are inevitable in the future, than was carried out in the case of the CTV building.