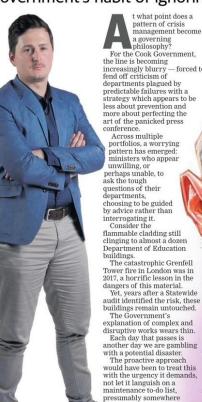
## ARLTON HA

## Not on fire? Not a proble

## Government's habit of ignoring issues until they hit crisis point flirts with fate



pattern of crisis management become

For the Cook Government, the line is becoming increasingly blurry — forced fend off criticism of — forced to predictable failures with a strategy which appears to be less about prevention and more about perfecting the

Tower fire in London was in 2017, a horrific lesson in the

presumably somewhere behind fixing a squeaky door.

This reactive

lurch is also on full display in the sudden "priority" to crack down on illegal

tobacco and vape shops. Police Minister Reece Whitby is now talking tough, promising new laws to shut down these fronts for organised crime

It's a bold and brilliant move, but one that raises the question: where was this urgency before? The violent

tobacco wars have been escalating on the east coast for

years.

It was only when flames and shootings erupted on Perth's streets that our Government realised the situation was a

realised the situation was a little more serious. One has to wonder if the policy memos were simply lost in the mail until the smoke signals from burning shops became impossible to ignore. Nowhere is the failure of

ministerial curiosity more evident than in our health system.
An infectious diseases

expert has warned that the methods used to trace legionnaires' cases at Sir Char<mark>les</mark> Gairdner Hospital are "critically flawed", potentially masking hospital-acquired

infections.
When questioned,
Health Minister Meredith
Hammat's office defaulted
to a now familiar refrain:
"The minister will The minister will

continue to be guided by advice from experts at WA Health.

Health."
A response so reassuringly
passive it makes you wonder if
the minister's primary role
is simply to forward

emails. This hands-off This hands-off approach is echoed by Health Infrastructure Minister John Carey's defensiveness over the crumbling state of our hospitals. It's a pattern of

accepting the departmental line without scrutiny, and it's reinforced

by the Government's increasing reliance on the faceless "State Government spokesperson". It's a tactic designed

to insulate ministers from to insulate ministers from accountability, creating a buffer between decision-makers and the public they serve.

Why hide behind a nameless

why nide benind a nameess representative if you have confidence in your actions? Whether it's flammable cladding on schools, lead and legionella in the water across our health system, the theme is

consistent.

Problems are left to fester until they become undeniable public crises — and these are only the ones we know about so far. Effective governance is not

Effective governance is not about racetracks, rugby teams or reactive press conferences. It is the relentless, often unglamorous, work of holding departments to account and asking uncomfortable questions.

questions.
No one, including our elected roo one, including our electro-representatives, should be expected to always get things right. What matters is taking accountability and fessing up even when the faecal matter from the burst sewage pipe at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital bits the for

hits the fan. Former US president Harry

Former US president Harry S. Truman famously kept a sign on his desk that read "The Buck Stops Here."

In WA's corridors of power, one gets the feeling that the signs all point to the nearest exit or, failing that, to the email address of a nameless spokesperson.

Perhaps it's time we gave this person a name and their own portfolio: Minister for Things That Might Look Bad. At this rate, they'd be the busiest person in government, at least then we'd know who was actually in charge.

Charlton Hart is a senior reporter

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