



Grenfell Tower tragedy prompts ban of combustible materials on the outside of high-rise buildings

BUSINESS

Contractors greedy for money hiking cladding audit prices on Gold Coast

Kirstin Payne, Gold Coast Bulletin

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GREEDY contractors are preying on vulnerable property owners in a combustible cladding cash grab.

Industry experts and authorities say tradies have been caught upping quotes 160 per cent to determine if hundreds of Gold Coast buildings have the same external materials that turned the Grenfell tower into an inferno in London in 2017, killing 72 people.

The Queensland Building and Construction Commission yesterday issued a statewide alert warning homeowners of audit price gouging as part of its Safer Buildings Combustible Cladding Checklist.

[QBCC PROBES ATTACK ON ITS WEBSITE AS THOUSANDS REGISTER UNDER NEW CLADDING LAWS](#)



he tower went up in flames in 2017. Picture: Sky News

Engineers and building compliance auditors said they were aware of a number of “sub par” checks by “inexperienced” professionals looking to make a quick buck.

The Bulletin this week [reported the owners of 677 buildings on the Gold Coast](#) – and more than 5000 throughout Queensland – had been ordered to undergo an independent audit into cladding.

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They are being slugged between \$4000 and \$6000 for the inspection and must have it complete before May 29 or face fines of up to \$20,000.

Builders, architects, registered engineers and level 1 building certifiers are all qualified to sign off on the audits.

[GOLD COAST PROPERTY OWNERS COULD BE SLUGGED WITH CLADDING BILLS](#)



 The remains of Grenfell Tower are seen from a neighbouring tower block on June 26, 2017 in London, England. (Photo by Carl Court/Getty Images)

Coast auditors said there had been examples of tradies pocketing the money, producing a vague report and then recommending owners fork out again for a more thorough inspection, instead of passing them phase three of the checklist, in which a fire engineer must inspect the building.

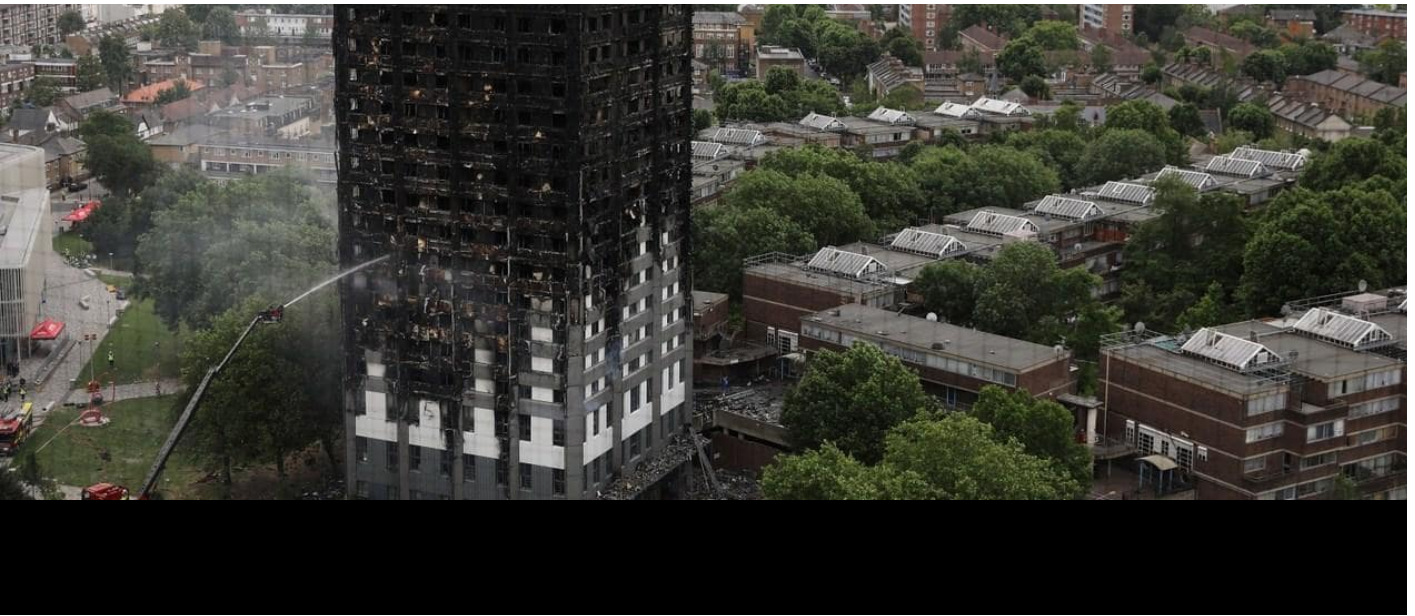
Burleigh engineer and master builder Jeffery Hills of JHA Australia, who has been in the industry for more than 35 years, said the situation was fuelled by greed.

“It happens all the time with government programs like this,” Mr Hills said.

“People with minimal qualifications set themselves up as experts in the field. Supply and demand adds to people’s greed.”

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Grenfell Tower inquiry shown firefighter footage of where the blaze began

“We are dealing with people’s safety here.”

He said his company physically tested the materials before giving owners an answer.

“A lot of auditors are just looking at the building, rather than taking samples, which is part of our procedure.”

On Tuesday, [peak body corporate group Strata Communities Australia formally asked the State Government to extend the May 29 deadline](#) because it was concerned that bodies corporate could not organise their affairs in time.

James Dunstan, the director of Professional Certification Group, said building professionals unsure of where they stood should refer clients to fire engineers.

“Because of the short time frame the doors have been opened for a wide amount of people to audit these buildings,” he said.

“Some people don’t have expertise in this stuff, which leads to very bad reports.

“If the process was restricted to experts we would see a more compliant outcome.”

The QBCC said it had been contacted by multiple building owners and representatives concerned about paying substantial audit fees.

It has urged building owners and voluntary management committees to seek multiple quotes to find the best possible adviser.