

# Flammable cladding apartment building risk list grows in Melbourne



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The Lacrosse Tower in Melbourne was the scene of a fire in 2014; work to remove flammable cladding began in 2019. Source: Nicole Garmston

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More than 75 buildings have been added to Victoria's flammable cladding risk list this year.

Cladding Safety Victoria figures show the Victorian Building Authority has referred 719 buildings to the organisation – up from 643 at the end of 2020.

To date, 249 buildings have been approved for funding to fix cladding issues.

Cladding Safety Victoria chief executive Dan O'Brien said it was carrying out works on about 200 buildings, but not every property could be assisted.

"CSV's job is to prioritise funding for the highest-risk buildings and that is what we are doing," Mr O'Brien said.

In some instances, that means the organisation is funding applications to the Building Appeals Board, requesting a building be allowed to remove only the most dangerous cladding in a partial fix, but leaving homeowners to pay for the actual work.

Last year, residents at a South Melbourne townhouse complex signed an agreement for Cladding Safety Victoria to spend up to \$50,000 investigating a partial solution that could be presented to the Building Appeals Board.

Emails seen by the Herald Sun show a Cladding Safety Victoria staffer later implied that partial rectification was underway.

Months later, the organisation said there would be no money for the works.

Ben Neve is among the owners and said the five residences had fallen from inside the Top 50 at-risk buildings in 2018 to the lower end of the more than 700 premises listed today.

In September, a risk assessment by Warrington Fire rated the three-storey South Melbourne complex with basement carparking "high risk" with flammable materials so close to the nearest fire hydrant that firefighters could have difficulty fighting it if there were a fire.



Archie Ladkin (7), Ben Ladkin (Father), Harvey Ladkin (3), Hudson Neve (4), Georgina Neve (1), Ben Neve (Father) outside their apartment building. Picture: Tony Gough

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Mr Neve said that his family, including his one-year-old daughter and four-year-old son, had spent years living in limbo as the “goalposts kept changing”.

A rough estimate for a partial rectification from Cladding Safety Victoria, which was given \$600m to rectify the state’s flammable cladding crisis in 2019, indicated even the more affordable solution would cost \$625,000.

The owners’ corporation is trying to renew insurance for the buildings, but is uncertain they will be able to obtain any cover by the time the current policy expires in August – after their insurer indicated it wanted to see an action plan for full removal.

CSV was formed in response to Docklands’ Lacrosse tower’s flammable cladding igniting in 2014 and a fatal fire at London’s Grenfell building. The government body was given \$600m to fund rectifications in 2019, when about 500 buildings needing works had been identified.

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