

Renewed push to get rid of cladding

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Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation Hon Kevin Anderson pictured at the 2019 Budget Estimates held at NSW Parliament in Sydney. Picture: Richard Dobson

Removal of dangerous cladding in NSW will be fast-tracked under a renewed push to rid the state's buildings of the potential deadly material.

The Berejiklian government has set up a panel of eight building and construction specialists to help building owners, councils and other regulators remove unsafe cladding across the state.

Better Regulation Minister Kevin Anderson said the Cladding Product Safety Panel would also help identify and test the safest ways to remove high-risk cladding.

“The panel will provide expert advice on how to undertake rectification work where unsafe cladding has been identified,” he said in a statement.

“It will also for the first time provide consistent and clear advice on what products can safely be used when replacing combustible cladding.”

The panel will outline products and installation systems that can be used to replace dangerous cladding and comply with the Building Code of Australia, Australian Standards and insurance requirements.

In 2014, the Melbourne Docklands Lacrosse apartment building in Victoria was set alight after cladding caught fire when a cigarette was discarded on an eighth-floor balcony.

After the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London that killed 72, serious attention was paid to the - implications of using flammable external cladding.

The disasters prompted a Senate inquiry in 2017 into non-conforming building products to highlight “some of the broader fire safety and insurance implications of recent fires in high-rise buildings in Australia and internationally”.

A report released by the inquiry into aluminium composite cladding said the Grenfell Tower incident demonstrated the need to “hasten the momentum for regulatory reforms”.

In 2017, then prime minister Malcolm Turnbull asked premiers and chief ministers to “urgently” audit high-rise buildings for non-conforming combustible cladding.

Some 405 buildings in NSW in line to have cladding removed are “under review, assessment or remediation”, according to the NSW Cladding Taskforce.

News of the renewed focus on cladding came after The Australian revealed in June a NSW government proposal to fund removal of flammable cladding from hundreds of buildings had been stalled for months amid concerns from Treasury officials about the cost of the venture.

It was also revealed some officials believed the government should not be liable for mistakes made by builders and other third parties.

The new panel will be chaired by Mark Hoffman, who led the investigation into building failures at Sydney’s Mascot and Opal towers.

The panel will consist of members with expertise in building and construction, product testing, building surveying, certification and fire safety engineering.

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