

'It's not fair': Sydney cladding crisis threatens to 'crush families' financially

By [Matt O'Sullivan](#)

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The owners of 130 buildings in inner Sydney have been told to replace flammable cladding or reveal more details about the composition of materials used, leaving individual apartment owners facing bills running into the tens of thousands of dollars.

The breadth of the cladding crisis in just one part of the city has led to fresh calls for the NSW government to [follow Victoria](#) in funding rectification work, partly given the financial pressure owners are already under due to the coronavirus-induced recession.



Apartment owner Adrian Shi. NICK MOIR

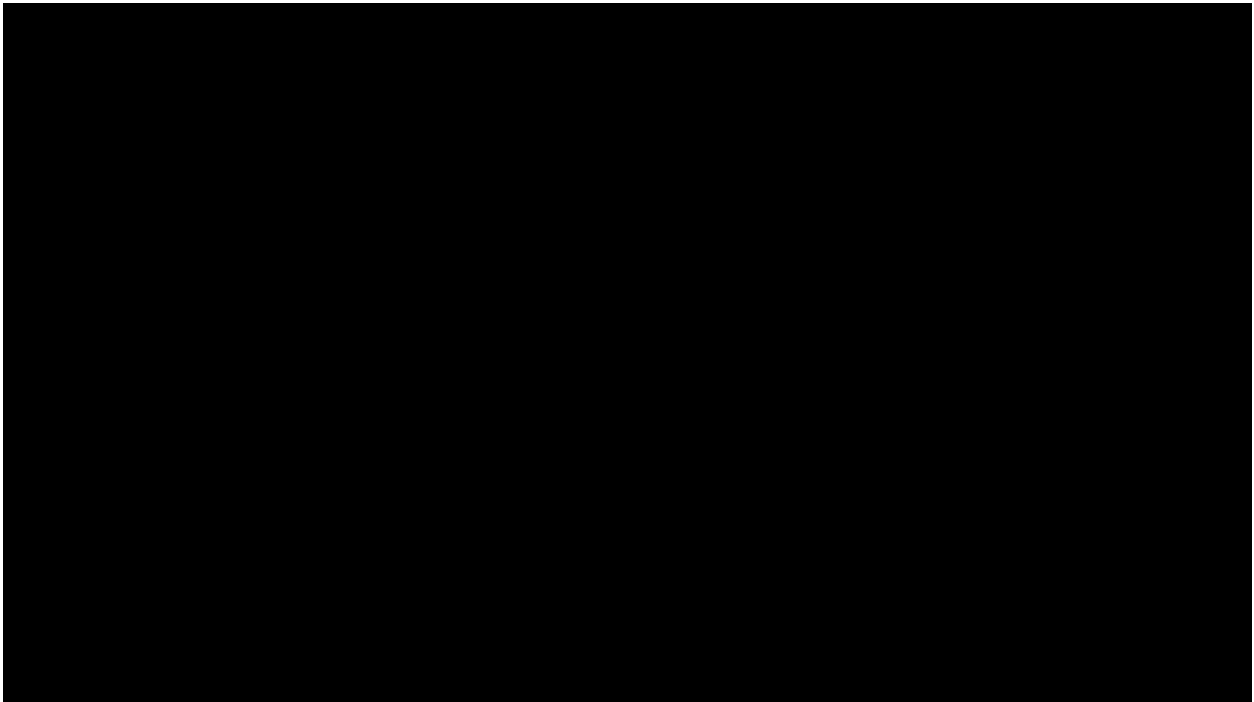
The City of Sydney, seemingly the worst affected in the state by combustible cladding, has issued fire safety notices for 130 buildings to date, up from 52 in

March.

Waterloo resident Adrian Shi was shocked to discover that he would have to pay \$25,000 over the next year to remove combustible cladding from his building in the inner-southern suburb.

"If it was just a few thousand dollars it would be acceptable but a \$25,000 hit comes at a very bad time. It is not fair for the owner to take full responsibility," he said. "The government should give us some help such as a long-term loan."

The \$25,000 special levy he faces is on top of a quarterly strata fee of \$1900. The total cost to owners of removing aluminium cladding from his complex has been estimated at \$5.6 million but it could end up costing more.



There are various types of cladding on the market, with some being more fire resistant than others.

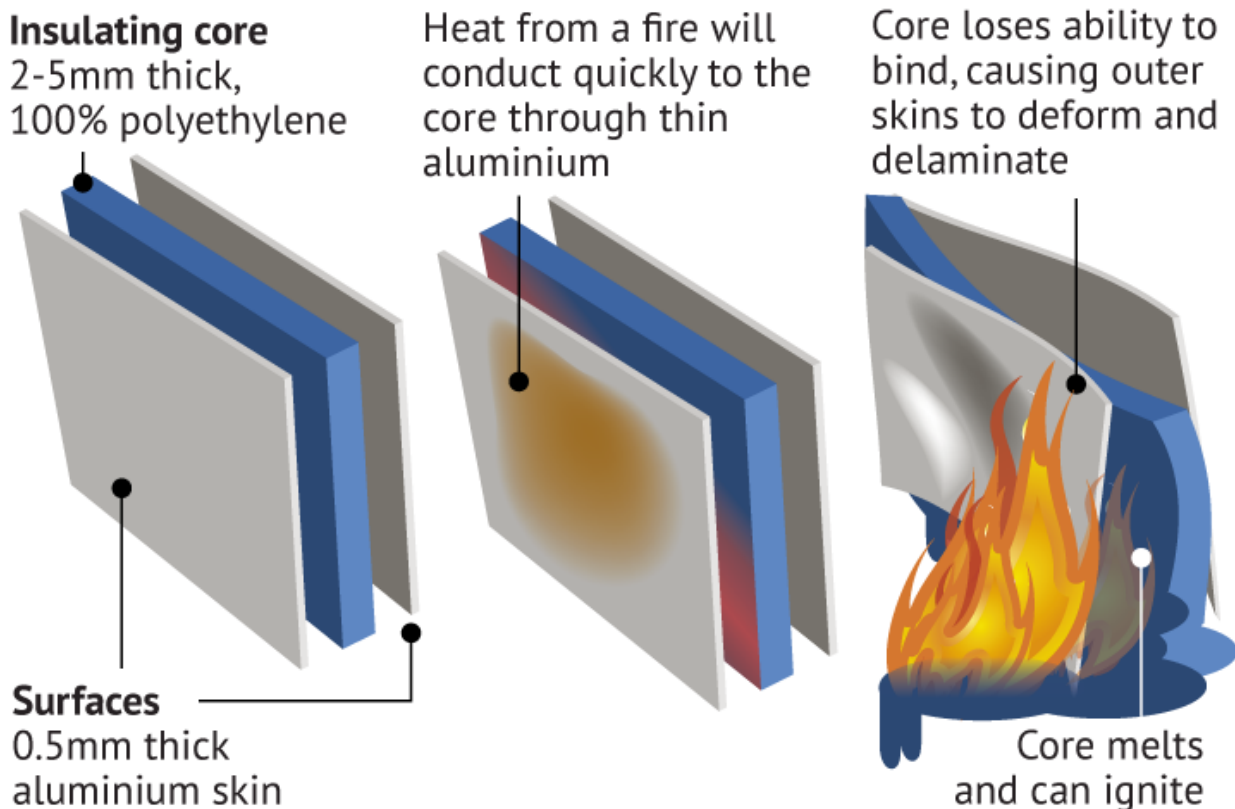
The solar-energy researcher at the University of NSW said his predicament highlighted the situation facing apartment owners across Sydney due to the combustible cladding crisis. "Considering many people's livelihoods are affected by COVID now, this unexpected financial burden will surely crush a lot of families," he said.

He and his wife bought their three-bedroom off the plan in 2010 and moved in two years later. "Nobody expects that at the time," he said of the cladding material used, which has since been found to have a flammable coating.

His is one of the buildings to have received a fire-safety notice from the City of Sydney, which is investigating and reviewing a total of 299 properties with potential combustible cladding.

Greens MP David Shoebridge, who chaired an inquiry into building standards, said the cost of fixing flammable cladding in NSW would be "well north" of \$1 billion, which would be borne by homeowners "let down by decades of deregulation".

Aluminium composite cladding panel Flammable core



Graphic: Jamie Brown

"We have individual homeowners spending tens of thousands of dollars undertaking rectification work that might have to be redone if the standards change," he said. "For some owners, it is almost as expensive identifying a credible remedy as it is undertaking the work."

Last year the [Victorian government](#) promised \$600 million to fix the most dangerous buildings.

Deputy NSW Labor leader Yasmin Catley said the Berejiklian government had a "golden opportunity" to follow Victoria in providing financial assistance, both creating jobs and solving a public safety problem.

City of Sydney councillor Linda Scott also urged the government to fund a rescue package to help fix strata buildings that contain flammable cladding.

"Thousands of residents across the City of Sydney have been left out in the cold, finding themselves liable for millions of dollars for repairs to remove flammable cladding," she said.

The government did not respond to questions about whether it would provide loans or some other form of financial assistance to owners.

However, a spokeswoman for Better Regulation Minister Kevin Anderson said the government had introduced new laws to protect building owners in NSW, which required anyone carrying out building work to avoid construction defects, including flammable cladding.

While the City of Sydney has one of the highest number of buildings identified with flammable cladding, other local government areas such as Bayside in the city's south, Canada Bay in the inner west and Liverpool each have had more than 20 buildings issued fire-safety notices.

In Canada Bay, a total of 77 were identified as a risk and fire-safety orders served on 33 buildings, while North Sydney Council has issued 27.

Bayside Council has issued 21 fire-safety notices after 74 buildings were identified in need of investigation, while in Liverpool 22 have been served.

Willoughby Council, whose area includes the high-rises of Chatswood, has investigated 66 buildings and issued fire-safety notices for 17. In the Hills Shire, 30 building owners will voluntarily replace combustible cladding while one has been served a notice.

In Blacktown, fire-safety notices have been issued for 10 buildings. Parramatta Council has issued six notices for buildings while the owners of a further 16 have been told to test and replace cladding if it is non-compliant.

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