

VIC NEWS

Melbourne’s cladding crisis laid bare

Security guards patrolled a suburban apartment block 24 hours a day to help residents evacuate if a fire broke out after dangerous cladding was discovered.

Matt Johnston and [Genevieve Alison](#), Herald Sun

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Security guards patrolled a suburban apartment block 24 hours a day to help residents evacuate if a fire broke out when [dangerous cladding](#) was discovered in 2017.

The building, which is yet to be fully repaired but no longer has roving security, was one of the “extreme risk” sites identified across the state that had combustible material on its walls.

Monash Council paid \$22,040 to hire the guards just a few weeks after the Grenfell Tower tragedy in the UK that claimed 72 lives.

Documents released to opposition planning spokesman Tim Smith under Freedom of Information lay bare the extent of the cladding crisis in Victoria and raise fresh questions about why authorities took so long to act.

Building materials used had little resemblance to those on permits, while poor installation of cladding also led to further problems.



Many properties in buildings identified in the documents, which the *Herald Sun* has chosen not to name due to concerns about arson, are now for sale. Picture: Sarah Matray

Dozens of buildings in the Monash area were found to be substandard, and those with shoddy cladding included a cancer care centre and several apartment blocks.

Many properties in buildings identified in the documents, which the *Herald Sun* has chosen not to name due to concerns about arson, are now for sale.

Vendors must outline if properties have dangerous cladding in sale documents.

The builders of the Clayton property which had security guard hired, appeared to lie about materials on the permit.

“Of great concern is that whilst the building permit documents provided for a cladding system consisting of non-combustible external cladding (referred to on approved drawings as ‘Multiboard’) the Building has been clad with combustible polystyrene panel system,” one report says.

“Council has arranged for 2 security guards to be present at the building 24 hours a day with the intention that in the event of an emergency they will be able to alert fire authorities and occupants and assist with the earliest possible evacuation from the building.”

Monash Mayor Shane McCluskey said the security guards were “a short-term measure and was considered necessary following an inspection of the building”.

“There have been works undertaken on the building to make sure it is safe and making the building safe has been the priority. The building is yet to be made compliant and this will involve more significant works in the future.”

Resident Gillian Chia, 23, said she had no idea her building contained the dangerous cladding.

“I feel really worried about it,” Ms Chia told the *Herald Sun*.

“It’s definitely something we should’ve been told,”

“It would’ve affected my decision to move in,” she said.





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sign on the front door details the risk. Picture: Sarah Matray

An A4 sign dated May 2019 and taped to the inside of the apartment entrance detailing the risk was cold comfort for many residents who said they had not noticed it.

“Most people don’t use this entrance, they’ll enter through the underground car park,” Ms Chia said.

The warning sign instructs residents to immediately remove portable barbecues and combustible hazards such as clothesline and storage items from balconies.

But the *Herald Sun* viewed barbecues, clothes lines and even bamboo screenings on first and second floor balconies.

“It’s really concerning, to know that people are still using things like barbecues when it could be dangerous,” Ms Chia said.

“It’s a general lack of awareness,” she said.

The medical student at nearby Monash University said she was unsure what needed to be done to remove the cladding, but said it should’ve been notified before making her decision to move in.

Mr McCluskey said the council had sent staff to the building and door knocked every apartment to ensure they knew the security staff were on sight and whether they had any concerns.

The Victorian Building Authority has since been declared the Municipal Building Surveyor for this and one other property in Clayton where dodgy cladding was a concern.

Mr Smith said the Andrews Government had been too slow to address the crisis given it “knew this building was a danger to life two years ago”.

He slammed Planning Minister Richard Wynne and said there should be an urgent inquiry into the Victorian Building Authority.



sign on the front door details the risk. Picture: Sarah Matray

“Victorians have a right to know if they’re living in a seriously dangerous building, and potential home buyers and renters must be better informed as well,” he said.

Last month, the Andrews Government announced a \$600 million fund to repair about 500 of the worst buildings with flammable cladding.

Mr Wynne said Cladding Safety Victoria had now been set up and “the first 15 of the most critical buildings have now been assessed and works will commence in the next couple of months”.

Premier Daniel Andrews said when he announced the fund that it would be paid for by taxpayers and through an increase to the building permit levy in Victoria.

The government will also consider new laws to crack down on dodgy builders who installed combustible cladding.

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A spokeswoman for the VBA said the authority had reinspected and met with the owners corporation at

all properties named in the FOI documents.

“The VBA engaged an independent consultant to assess the essential safety measures in the buildings to ensure the buildings are safe to occupy while rectification takes place,” she said.

“The issue of combustible cladding is acknowledged as a global regulatory failure.

“The responsibility for the regulatory oversight on specific buildings originally lies with the relevant building surveyor at time of build, and secondly with the local council.”

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