



Aaron Nicholson



"The building categorically does not have combustible cladding on it" ...



Aaron Nicholson

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All views and opinions are my own and not that of my employer.

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"The building categorically does not have combustible cladding on it"

and

"We know what was used and its definitely not combustible"

Both sentences repeated by a real estate agent to a potential apartment buyer in the last week. Fortunately for the prospective purchaser she sought independent advice and engaged RED fire engineers to look at the apartment specifically to see if any combustible cladding was present.



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prospective purchaser to engage a fire engineer for a site inspection specifically to see if any combustible cladding was present.

The site inspection took around an hour and while not all areas of the building were accessible, two different types of ACP on three different elevations of the building were found:

- Grey core (expected to be FR type with 7-30% Polyethylene (PE) core)
- Black core (expected to be 30-100% PE core)

(<https://www.vba.vic.gov.au/?a=97579>)

The prospective purchaser was to be informed of the findings and advised that sampling and testing would be required if the polymer % was required to be known. The prospective purchaser could therefore make an informed decision on whether they wish to proceed or not.

Job done...except that's not the end of the story.

Other Issues:

While walking into the property I noticed a red commissioning detector cap covering a detector.



No alt text provided for this image

(not a photo of the actual detector but an example)



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system. Smoke will not set off the detector covered by one of these caps so this particular detector was not able to detect smoke and do its job - which is to alert occupants (day and night) of the presence of smoke in the egress route.

I noted stored goods (fire load) under the single stair (its not a tall building).

I noted that the apartment doors and doors enclosing the single stair did not have self-closing devices installed. The single stair could therefore easily become smoke logged and compromised by a fire in any of the apartments, storage areas or car park which opened onto the stair enclosure.

I looked at the fire indicator panel on the way out of the building and noted that the whole panel had no power. No lights at all. So the red commissioning detector cap covering the detector is the least of the concerns here as the system isn't operational at all.

How long have the building occupants been unprotected for?

Why is the whole system turned off - were there faults with the system?

Where is the Strata manager and the Essential Safety Measures maintenance in all this?

I spoke with the prospective purchaser again and she told me that she had engaged a building inspection report and that neither the combustible cladding or the fire alarm issues (the two most obvious issues here) had been picked up.

I contacted the Municipal Building Surveyors office at the local council and emailed through my photos with a description of what I had found. I expect they will follow up



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I emailed and spoke to the real estate agent to explain that combustible cladding had been found. He was very surprised to say the least but did understand and agree that reporting this to the council was the right course of action.

The point:

The point of the article is that not everyone involved in selling an apartment or inspecting an apartment building prior to purchase can identify combustible cladding and it is too easy to take verbal assurances which may prove to be false. Please contact a fire engineer.

I can't excuse the building inspection report from not noting the fire alarm issues as the fire indicator panel was at the entrance on display and not in a cupboard or the like. This should have been a simple pickup for any inspector and the red commissioning detector cap was clearly visible against the white ceiling.

While its not the point of the article, the prospective purchaser decided not to proceed. She did however have the information to make an informed decision about negotiating the purchase price taking into account the now known issues or walking away.

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Scott Rubie

2d

Scott Rubie

How many buildings like this are out there. Friends ask me to review pre purchase reports quite often. Its horrifying the caveats of these reports and yet they make comment on the exact issues. Incorrect references to compliance requirements and to the point of providing remedial actions. Sadly usually in the pocket of the Real Estate agents and have a combined vested interest. An ACP isn't to difficult to identify and at least raise a question, where a product with EPS may not be as easy to identify. A real estate agent sadly for their profession is the last person a purchaser should be listening to. Fortunately the client had the knowledge to engage a trained professional to undertake the risk assessment and pro-



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Bill Gleeson

Bill Gleeson

Have to agree with the sentiments here. One of the hardest parts of my job dealing with cladding is explaining to owners how this could have gone through all the approvals and inspections, and still found it's way onto the building.

The discovery of combustible cladding often leads to inspection of other parts of the building, where other major issues are often found.

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2d



Aaron Nicholson

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This was exactly the conversation I had...down to the discussion around other issues often being found upon further inspection and especially upon removal of the combustible cladding panels

Like Reply

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Blair Stratton

Blair Stratton

I was so angry at our industry when we discussed this the other day Aaron. The building is 10 years old and it is so obviously poorly designed, built, commissioned, inspected, certified, and maintained (indeed many of those simple and legislated steps seem to have been skipped). At each stage in the building's life, trained and registered professionals were paid good money to make sure the building - home to many families - is safe. And at every turn people have skirted their responsibilities, clipped the ticket, and turned a blind eye.

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Aaron Nicholson

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Agreed.

I haven't stopped thinking about this one since the day of inspection (hence the article). I wonder how many apartments with combustible cladding and other easily identifiable issues have been bought post lacrosse or even grenfell by unsuspecting buyers.

I just cant believe how bad the industry has gotten.

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Luke de Schot

Luke de Schot

Interesting Aaron, a good example of due diligence, it's a shame people can't say "I don't know about that" rather than stating 'facts' they can't back up. I wonder where the estate agent got his information from that he was so sure about..?

Good on the prospective owner for seeking out expert advice, sounds like she dodged a few issues, money well spent I would suggest.

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The real estate agent was told by the vendor (not exactly an independent source is it).

The vendor was adamant that the builder was "affiliated" with the VBA and therefore there could not be any issues

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the engineer to look at every apartment she considers buying. While I understand the statement, we did discuss that maybe she cant really afford not to as in this case.

What a difficult position for a prospective purchaser to be in

Let me know your thoughts


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