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Combustible cladding being removed from Wodonga school following statewide audit



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UNDERWAY: Contractors are on site at the Wodonga Senior Secondary College, where non-compliant cladding is being removed. The school is one of 13 in Victoria where cladding is being removed. Picture: MARK JESSER

Combustible cladding is being removed from the Wodonga Senior Secondary College, the only regional school out of 13 across Victoria where rectification works are taking place.

Contractors are removing [the non-compliant material](#) from the 'Regeneration' building, completed at a cost of \$11.8 million in 2014.

The state government launched a taskforce on cladding in 2017, following a fire in Melbourne and the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

As at July, 2227 buildings had been inspected, including 384 owned by the government, with 1069 found to have cladding.

WSSC principal Vern Hilditch made an announcement about the cladding at the Brockley Street building on the school's website.

"Building contractors will begin removing and replacing the cladding section-by-section in the next few weeks," he wrote.

"As replacement of these sections takes place, they will be isolated and the Department is working with us to minimise the impact on students and the wider school community.

"All removal and replacement works are scheduled to be completed in December 2019."

The August 20 post outlined a panel of fire engineers and surveyors had determined there were no known risks to students and staff, and that safety measures like running additional fire drills were enacted.

A Department of Education spokeswoman said safety was the priority.

"We are removing non-compliant cladding identified at 13 schools across the state, in response to the Victorian Cladding Taskforce's recommendations," she said.

The taskforce focuses on multi-storey hospitals, schools, aged care facilities, apartments and other buildings that fall under classes two, three or nine under the National Construction Code, that were built after 1997.

According to the Victorian Building Authority's website, two privately-owned buildings in Wodonga and one privately-owned building in Wangaratta have been identified by the audit.

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In high-risk cases emergency rectification works, such as adding more smoke alarms or turning off electrical items with cabling through the cladding, is enacted.

Two categories of product, ACP and Expanded Polystyrene (EPS), have been used in most cases and the audit "has observed a trend in the inappropriate use of EPS on lower-rise buildings (up to 10 storeys) in ... regional cities".

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Further, many higher risk buildings are less than six storeys, so they are not required to have sprinklers.

The interim report stated the Victorian government, "the only jurisdiction to have proactively sought to identify buildings with combustible cladding", had put \$20.5 million to works at schools and hospitals in 2018.

"Works are already underway, and in some cases completed, on these buildings," the report said.