

# Andrews government crackdown on dodgy builders

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Victoria's Andrews government will fund a new multimillion-dollar authority dedicated to rectifying flammable cladding on apartments and will toughen laws to pursue shonky builders who used the dangerous products.

Daniel Andrews told a property luncheon on Tuesday that Labor would introduce a “dedicated authority” to deal with the issue “once and for all”.

“I’m not today in a position to be able to announce the size and the scale or the funding sources, but we will see a significant contribution from consolidate revenue,” Mr Andrews said.

“There will be some certainty brought to this market. Because I know from talking to plenty of people in real estate these are stranded assets and it’s very difficult to sell an apartment that’s under a cladding cloud.”

The government is awaiting a report from its cladding task force headed by former Liberal Premier Ted Baillieu and former Labor deputy premier John Thwaites, who conducted an audit of cladding-affected buildings in Victoria.

The Victorian Cladding Task force said in October there were 384 government occupied building with potentially combustible cladding.

Of the privately-owned buildings reviewed, there were 43 considered “highest risk”, 232 deemed “high risk”, 228 rated “moderate risk” and 126 ranked “low risk”.

The state government had flagged future announcements, but details emerged of a cached version of a website — which has since been pulled down — for a new agency called “Cladding Safety Victoria” which offered advice and assistance in the removal of and rectification of combustible cladding.

Mr Andrews confirmed later a new agency would be formed saying this was the best way to deal with a “significant” problem.

“I want to make those buildings cladding safe as fast as we can. We do have to acknowledge it will take some time,” he said.

Mr Andrews also flagged crackdown on builders who used the cladding.

“There’s some interesting times ahead for some building professionals too, who have not done the right thing,” he said.

“The regulator with increased powers and a renewed focus is going to have more to say about that soon. Very independent of us of course.

“But we’ve given them what they need to crack down on some people who have simply done the wrong thing.”

Fears of a cladding-fuelled disaster in Australia grew after the Grenfell tower tragedy in London two years ago where 72 people died.

There have been two major cladding related tower fires in Victoria, the Lacrosse building fire in Docklands in November 2014 and the Neo200 fire in February. No one was hurt in these fires.

The Lacrosse building fire resulted in significant legal action between the owners of the building and the developers, with the developers ultimately paying \$5.7 million in damages.

In an ABC interview on Tuesday morning, Mr Andrews hinted that money could be recovered from developers.

“There can potentially be some money — some — recovered from those who have done this, who have basically committed these errors and used this dodgy product.”

Victoria’s opposition attacked Labor for taking too long to address the problem.

“It is now 572 days since Labor said they were “taking action on cladding”, the time for action is now,” Shadow Minister for Planning Tim Smith said.

“This is a joke, we need action now, before someone is killed by this highly combustible material.”