

UTS Broadway: Cheesegrater building in combustible cladding fears

It opened to much fanfare just seven years ago, scooping a hatful of award nominations. But now UTS bosses will have to strip the landmark building over combustible cladding fears.



David Barwell

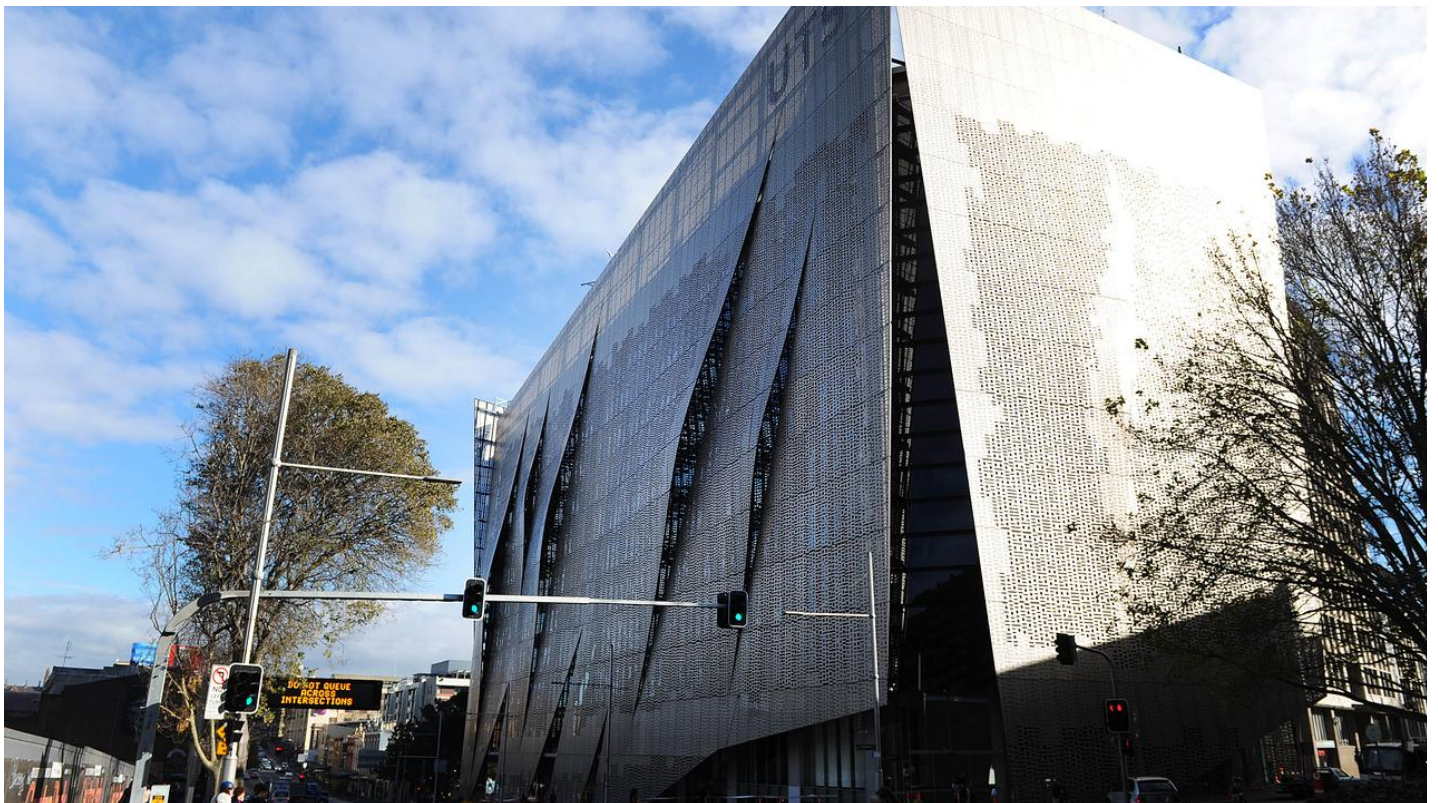
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A leading Sydney university has been ordered to get rid of combustible cladding from a state-of-the-art campus building amid fears of a potential fire risk.

The Department of Planning has issued University of Technology Sydney with a fire safety order after a site inspection found combustible aluminium composite cladding panels covering 3046 sqm of the campus.

The department said the cladding was located on the 13 storey state-of-the-art faculty of engineering and IT building at the university's Broadway campus.

It was opened to students just seven years ago and was won and been nominated for several awards.



Cladding has been detected on the faculty of engineering and IT building.

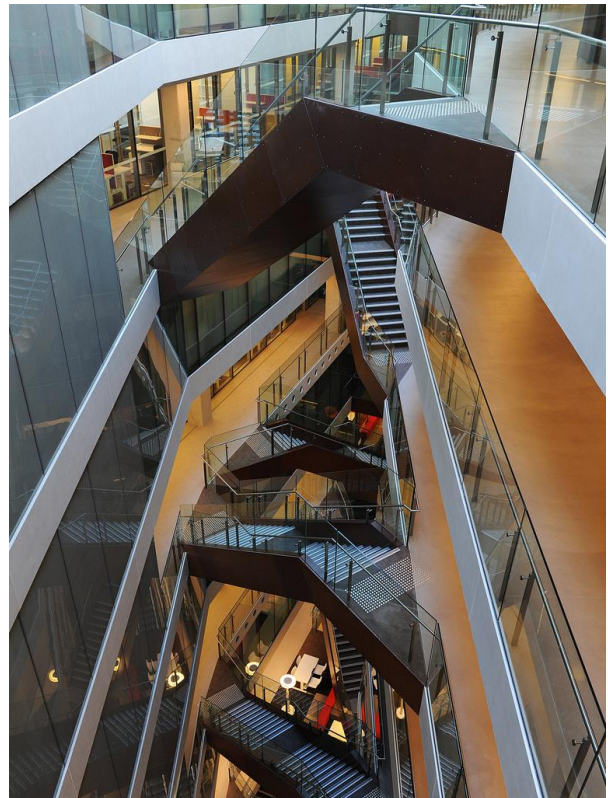
The prominent building – nicknamed the ‘cheesegrater’ by UTS for its facade of aluminium screens – was opened in 2014 as part of the university’s \$1 billion-plus master plan redevelopment.

The building is the single-largest in the masterplan and includes hi-tech teaching facilities including a data arena and exterior LED lighting that illuminates the building at night.

The fire safety order requires the material to be replaced with non-combustible materials along with implementing measures to reduce fire safety risks associated with the material until rectification works are complete.



The building received construction cost funding from the State and Federal Governments.



A photo inside the building.

In a statement, UTS said a head contractor would soon be appointed to undertake the design and construction work for removing and replacing the panels.

“This will be done behind the decorative screen, using scaffolding and abseiling at height,” a spokeswoman said.

The university said the panels would be replaced with 3mm solid aluminium panels at an estimated construction cost of \$3.5 million.

The spokeswoman said the panels were located mainly on the north elevation of the building and the adjoining bridge links across Penny Lane.

The university has implemented additional fire safety measures including increased testing and maintenance of fire systems, updates to building emergency and evacuation plans, 24/7 security in the building and heat-sensing cameras.



A photo of the site during construction periods.

The work is expected to be completed by October 2022 – two months ahead of the Department of Planning’s deadline.

UTS will also have to provide an inspection report issued by an accredited certifier, certifying that the replacement panels and method of installation comply with the Building Code of Australia.

The order comes as latest figures show 372 buildings across NSW are under review for external wall cladding or where remediation is underway as of February this year.

The figures are published by the NSW Cladding Taskforce which was set up in the wake of the Grenfell tower disaster in London in 2017.

The UTS spokeswoman said panels used in the construction of the building met regulations at the time they were installed with the ban on aluminium composite panels coming into effect in 2018.

She said the building would remain open during the replacement works.

“Every effort will be made to minimise disruption to students and staff. There will be no internal works. Noisy works will be scheduled outside of regular office hours,” she said.

“The safety of UTS students and staff is our top priority.”