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 A huge fire engulfs the 24-storey Grenfell Tower in West London. Picture: Getty Images

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Owners ordered to step up fire safety in wake of cladding discovery

Emma-Jayne Schenk, Caulfield Glen Eira Leader

March 14, 2019 12:00am

 Subscriber only



Owners at a Bentleigh apartment building have been ordered to conduct urgent safety upgrades to prevent a Grenfell Tower-style tragedy.

And as authorities clamp down on fire regulations on apartment blocks across Melbourne, it's unlikely they'll be the last ones forced to do costly rebuilding.

The three-storey complex at 270 Centre Rd was on March 6 deemed at "extreme risk" due to potentially dangerous combustible cladding found during a Victorian Building Authority inspection yesterday.

While the finding was later downgraded to “elevated risk”, residents must immediately upgrade fire alarm systems and remove potential ignition sources from balconies.

And they could face a mammoth long-term clean up bill ranging from \$30,000 to \$60,000 for each apartment if the cladding has to be replaced.

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People living in the complex refused to speak to Leader, but VBA spokeswoman Karen Lyon confirmed the Centre Rd building had an elevated fire risk because of combustibile cladding, and said a fire warden had been deployed to the site.

“Once the short-term fire safety upgrades are completed, the building owners will be asked to come up with a long-term plan to fix the building,” Ms Lyon said.

Cladding concerns were sparked following the Grenfell Tower fire in London in 2017 that killed 72 people, and a huge fire at a Spencer St apartment block in Melbourne in January.


It’s believed hundreds of apartment blocks are affected but when asked, Ms Lyon could not confirm what other local buildings, if any, had been deemed dangerous — and the Victorian Government has refused to introduce a public register due to arson concerns.

Since December 2017, the government has audited more than 2000 buildings believed to have flammable cladding and 60 have been considered to have the highest risk of fire.



he six apartments went up for sale in 2014.



 The apartment complex at 270 Centre Rd Bentleigh.

About 150 “show cause” notices have also been issued to owners, and expert teams ranked another 232 buildings as “high risk”, and 228 buildings as “moderate risk”.

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As of last month, work to remove cladding had only started on one of the most dangerous sites.

Glen Eira planning director Ron Torres said the council was working with the VBA to ensure residents remained safe until rectification works were complete.

“Council maintains that action and works are still necessary to ensure that risk of combustion is minimised, but owners have the right to appeal the notice,” Mr Torres said.