

Cladding removal plan fails to move

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The NSW government has come under attack for failing to remove dangerous combustible cladding on high-rise and commercial buildings after admitting more than 200 buildings have been identified as “high-risk” of fire, posing an immediate threat to thousands of occupants.

In Friday’s budget estimates, Better Regulation and Innovation Minister Kevin Anderson confirmed 214 residential buildings had been identified by the NSW Cladding Taskforce as “high-risk”.

The figures show more than a hundred additional sites are at risk across the state, after The Australian revealed 103 residential buildings were identified as “high-risk” within the City of Sydney earlier this year.

Responding to criticisms that his department was too slow and ineffective in addressing the state’s ongoing cladding crisis, Mr Anderson said: “We’ve got a timeline ... This is a huge project. We don’t want to look at the way other jurisdictions have handled combustible cladding.

“I don’t believe they (other states) have got a strategic methodical plan in place.”

While fielding questions about state building standards, combustible tests and cladding materials, Mr Anderson was also criticised for the delayed rollout of Project Remediate — the interest-free loan scheme designed to assist owners in the rectification of dangerous cladding.

“We’re now in March ... We’re now three years after the Grenfell Tower disaster (in which 72 people died),” said Greens MP David Shoebridge.

“When are your landmark cladding reforms to remediate and make safer building going to start?”

The \$139m project was announced at the beginning of last November, but Mr Anderson’s department has failed to meet its assigned 2020 deadline, saying on Friday they require further discussion between “Treasury and financial institutions about how that facility will be set up”.

However, sources suggested that the project’s delay came after the government’s lead financial backer pulled out late last year.

Asked whether he was concerned that dangerous cladding was still being used in the construction of residential high-rises across NSW, Mr Anderson replied: “I don’t believe that to be the case given the fact they would still have to (comply) with Australian standards and the National Construction Code”.

Mr Anderson conceded there was significant work still to be done.

The government's Cladding Product Safety Panel is due to release its report on recommended products at the end of March.