

POLITICS VICTORIA CONSTRUCTION

Residents across city told their apartment wrapped in dangerous cladding

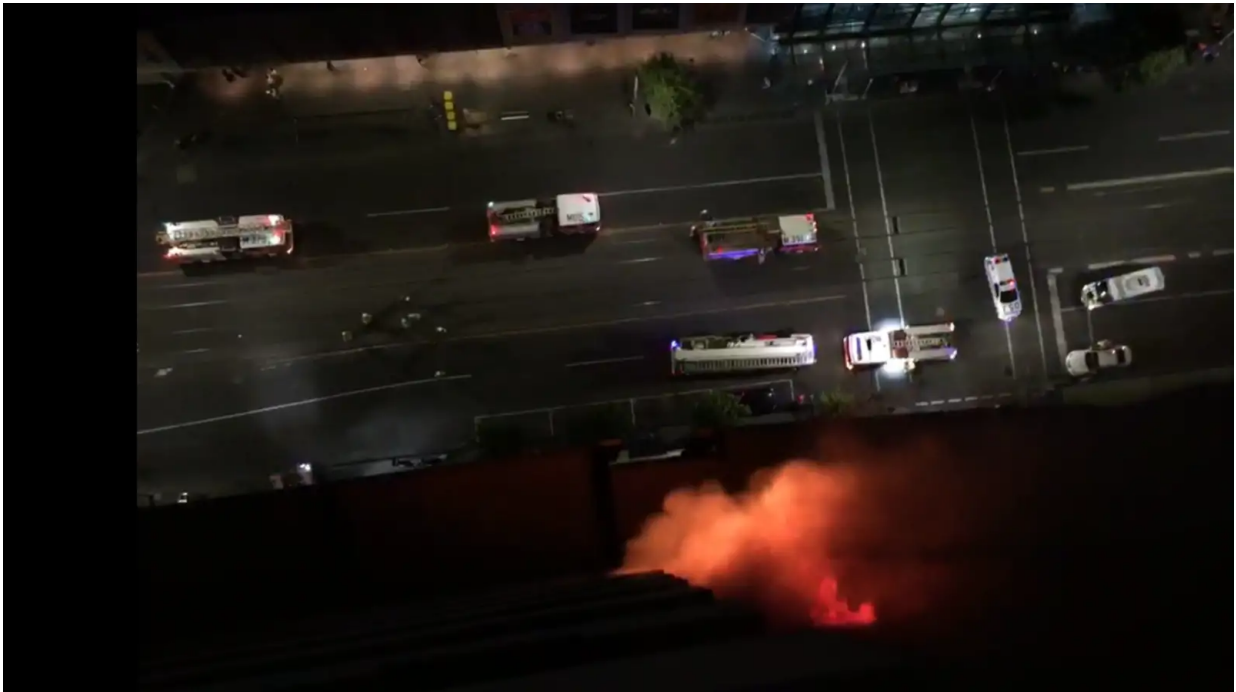
By [Clay Lucas](#)

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Thousands of residents living in apartments across Melbourne have been told for the first time that they are living in buildings that are likely covered in dangerous flammable cladding.

Planning Minister Richard Wynne has taken over responsibility for 283 apartment buildings around the city that may have dangerous cladding on some or all of their exterior.



A resident's view of a cladding fire in a tower on Spencer Street last month. Many residents in the tower did not know of the building's dangerous cladding, despite it being put on a confidential list by the Andrews government in 2017.

They are the buildings considered the most dangerous from an initial confidential list compiled by an Andrews government taskforce established two years ago.

The new buildings are on top of 44 others considered extremely dangerous that Mr Wynne already removed from councils and gave planning powers to the Victorian Building Authority.

But he has [kept confidential the buildings' addresses](#), saying that naming them could make the buildings the target of arsonists or terrorists.

This is despite the government previously naming all public hospitals covered in flammable cladding.



Works under way last month to replace the flammable cladding on the planning department's building at 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne.

Opposition planning spokesman Tim Smith said the secrecy was ridiculous, and that the government should act immediately to make all apartment buildings safe.

Many buildings around Melbourne with flammable cladding have already been identified in the media in the wake of a 2014 Docklands cladding fire that brought the matter to national attention.

Scrutiny intensified on thousands of buildings around Australia covered in flammable cladding after 2017's deadly Grenfell tower blaze in London, in which 72 public housing tenants died.





London's Grenfell tower burns in June 2017. EVENING STANDARD

Over the past fortnight affected residents have started receiving letters as a result of the Andrews government taking over responsibility for removing the dangerous cladding.

While most apartment owners with flammable cladding already knew of the costly problem, many renters have been surprised to learn of the danger if there is a fire.

The letter from the Victorian Building Authority warns residents they must, among other things, “keep balconies clear of clutter” and “not use barbecues or heaters on balconies”.

The letter also warns owners selling properties that they must include notice in real estate documents that there is an issue with cladding.

Several residents who received letters from the authority contacted *The Age* to voice their alarm that the state government had taken over their building.

While councils and the state have been slow to act to ensure private apartments are made safe, a fire last year at the government’s planning department prompted the owners of that building to remove dangerous cladding immediately.

Works to remove that cladding are almost complete.

Mr Smith said the speed with which that building had been made safe was in stark contrast to hundreds of apartments around the state.

“Dick Wynne sorts out his own office but all these residents who are dealing with this genuine concern about the safety of their own homes, all they get is a letter from the Victorian Building Authority,” Mr Smith said.

“The only thing that should concern the government is the safety of peoples’ houses. If their property is unsafe, the government must take steps either by working with the property sector or through some other direct action,” he said.



Clay Lucas



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