


## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Owner tests optional at Sydney buildings with fire-risk cladding

**EXCLUSIVE**By **ANDREW CLENNELL**, NSW POLITICAL EDITOR12:00AM JUNE 5, 2019 •  14 COMMENTS

More than 340 buildings in central Sydney have been identified as having cladding that poses a potential fire risk.

But in the wake of the June 2017 Grenfell disaster in London, in which 72 people died, the Berejiklian government has backed away from a commitment to force owners to carry out assessments.

Despite 341 buildings being on the combustible cladding register, including shopping centres and several at the University of Sydney, fire safety orders have been issued on only seven.

Eighteen buildings owned by the University of Sydney are on the register but are listed as not having been assessed for fire risks. They include lecture theatres, a childcare centre, student housing and sports facilities.

Other prominent buildings on the list include the Central Park unit development at Broadway, and The Strand, Galleries and QVB shopping centres.

Each council in the state has been provided with a register of potentially flammable buildings, but the government has asked that the information not be made public. The reason given by the government for the inaction on assessments is a lack of building inspectors.

In explaining why late last year it removed the requirement for building owners to assess the risk from combustible cladding, the government says on its Planning Department website: "Since then, there has been a tightening in the professional indemnity insurance market, which has the potential to affect the availability of experts to carry out the work. To help deal with issues around the supply

of experts, mandatory assessments have been removed from the regulation. These may be considered at a later stage.”

Greens MP David Shoebridge, who gained access to the list of buildings through freedom-of-information laws via the City of Sydney council, accused the government of inaction.

“This is failed regulation by a government that refuses to take meaningful action. They have just handed the whole mess to local councils without providing any new resources or powers to fix it,” he said.

“In the City of Sydney alone, there is a list of more than 340 properties that are at potential risk from flammable cladding, but no one is doing anything about it.

“We need to immediately revisit the regulations and either require owners to properly assess and address the risk or give councils fresh powers and resources to do it for them.

“The state government hiding behind problems in the insurance market is just embarrassing.”

The government said last night that assessments were the responsibility of councils, but Mr Shoebridge said it was pushing the problem on to authorities that lacked funds to tackle the issue.

A spokesman for Better Regulation Minister Kevin Anderson said: “All buildings that were identified as posing a potential higher risk due to the presence of cladding have been formally referred by the Fire Commissioner to the respective local councils.

“The referral ... requires council to undertake an investigation of the fire safety of the building, or require building owners to do so, and ... to formally report back to the commissioner. The taskforce monitors the performance of councils under these referrals and the Office of Local Government follows up failures to respond appropriately.”