


Victorian Building Authority raises further concerns with Hickory Group

A major construction company already caught up in a legal stoush over flammable cladding is now being scrutinised by the building watchdog over a litany of additional accusations.

ANDREW KOUBARIDIS, Sunday Herald Sun

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 An Anstey Square apartment caught fire two years ago. Picture: Wayne Taylor

A major construction company under scrutiny for [flammable cladding](#) has now raised the building watchdog's ire over a litany of additional building defects.

Hickory Group — run by brothers Michael Argyrou and his brother — is accused of wrongly using sections of wood building frames instead of metal, skimping on cement rendering and leaving parts of walls unsealed.

The Victorian Building Authority claims to have identified the problems at the trouble-plagued Anstey Square apartment complex in Brunswick, which caught fire two years ago.

The building is at the centre of a legal stoush over Hickory's use of flammable aluminium cladding, as uncovered in the *Sunday Herald Sun*.

It can now be revealed the authority's concerns go even further with Hickory accused of breaching its building permit.

It's claimed the construction giant:

- Applied just a third of the 10mm of cement-based render required on external walls;
- Used timber framing for some external walls instead of required metal framing set out in approved architectural drawings; and
- Wrongly left parts of walls unsealed.

Hickory in a statement told the *Sunday Herald Sun*: “We are currently addressing all the points raised in the VBA and our response will be submitted within the turnaround period.” “Due to this being a legal matter we are not allowed to defend the claims in a public forum,” it said.

“The next steps are to actively comply with the VBA’s requests and we are in the process of responding in detail.”

Michael Argyrou — who was issued with a notice demanding he show why he shouldn’t face penalties — had attempted to stop the building authority’s action.

Barrister Jason Pizer QC, representing Mr Argyrou who was in remote Indonesia, told the Supreme Court the building authority did not have jurisdiction in the case.

This was because the powers were given after the alleged offences occurred.

But Justice Michael McDonald dismissed the claims, telling the court he was reluctant to intervene when the case was in its infancy and there were other avenues Mr Argyrou could pursue.

He was given an extra 14 days to prove why he shouldn’t face sanctions.

Hickory said the judge stated its application “had merit”.

The *Sunday Herald Sun* in September revealed 25 Hickory-built properties were found during a statewide audit to have non-compliant cladding.

At least 17 buildings were rated a high or extreme fire risk.

Hickory has maintained cladding in its buildings was compliant at the time of installation.

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