

Cladding Safety Victoria boss Dan O'Brien likens flammable building panels to asbestos

The head of Victoria's world-first cladding safety agency has likened flammable cladding to deadly asbestos, revealing the shocking number of structures found to be at risk.

Jack Paynter, Leader

| October 19, 2019 6:00am



The new Cladding Safety Victoria boss has revealed up to 35 per cent of Melbourne buildings audited had flammable cladding.

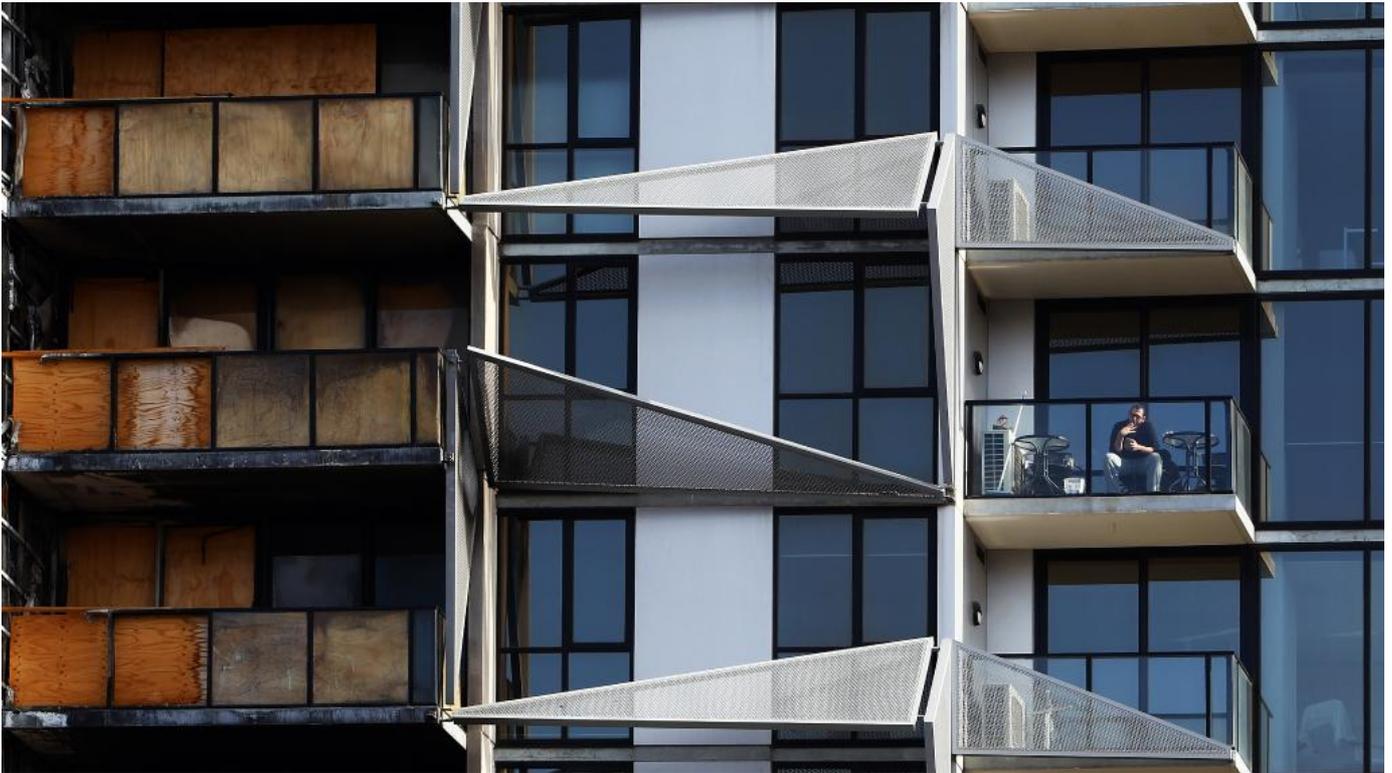
The head of Victoria's cladding safety agency has likened the [flammable material](#) to the notoriously dangerous substance asbestos.

Cladding Safety Victoria chief executive Dan O'Brien also revealed 35 per cent of buildings audited had combustibile cladding.

During a speech at a Strata Community Australia conference last week, Mr O'Brien said the Statewide Cladding Audit by the Victorian Building Authority

had [inspected 2300 buildings since it began in 2017](#), with 805 found to have aluminium composite panels or expanded polystyrene.

He said 416 buildings had been identified as high risk.



Lacrosse Tower in Docklands where developers used flammable cladding, which led to a widespread fire started by a cigarette butt.

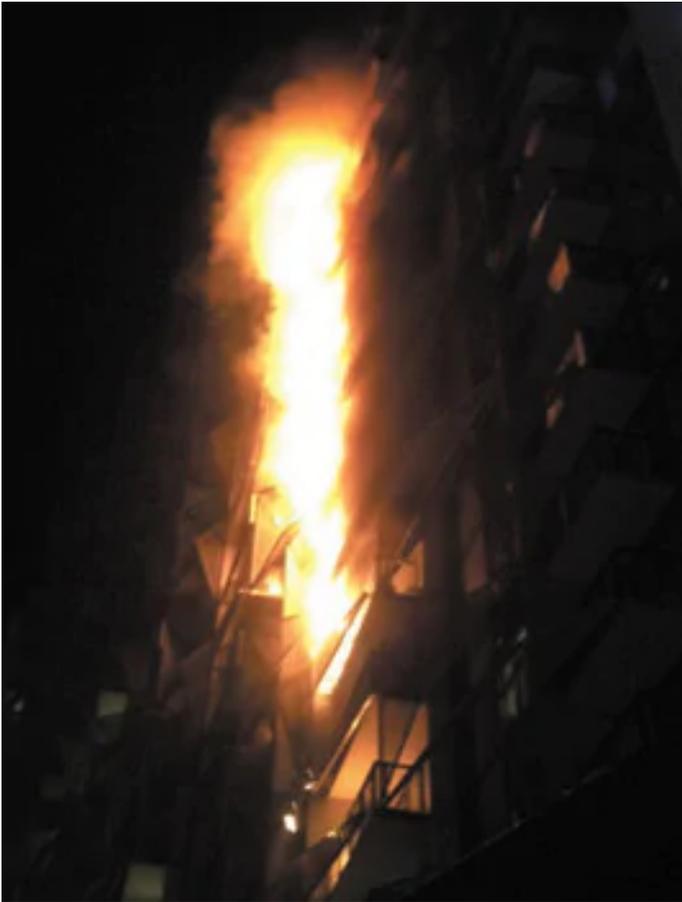
“We’re taking what the Environment Protection Authority considers toxic waste, we’re taking that off buildings,” Mr O’Brien said.

“The EPA ... will be classifying this waste, I understand, as a class C waste — a bit like asbestos.

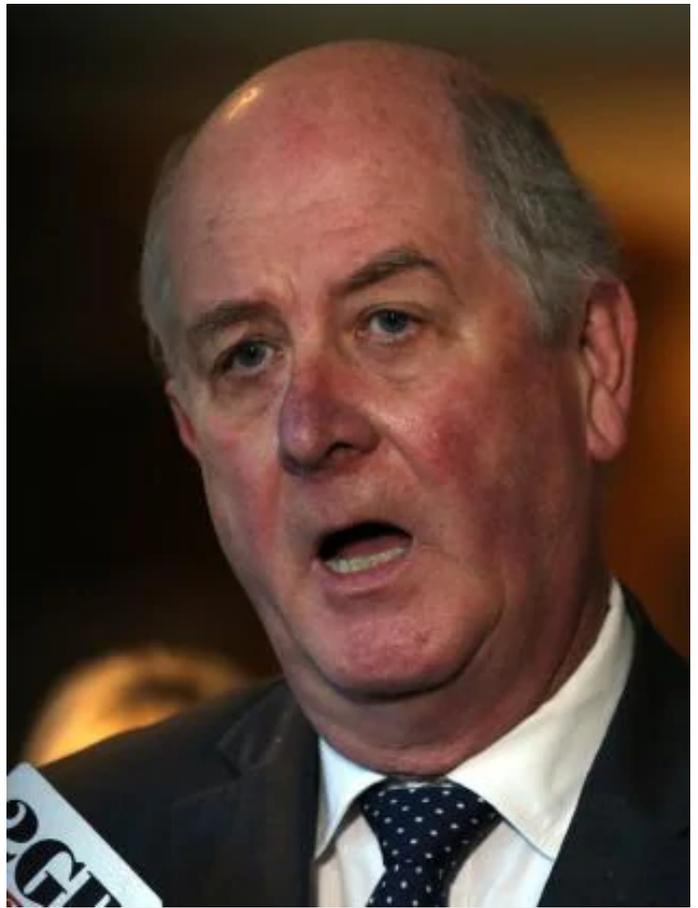
“From the time we take the cladding off to the time it is disposed of, it will need to be treated and stored properly and EPA is keeping a pretty close eye on that.”

He said they would try to recycle the aluminium and polystyrene from the cladding as much as practical.

Cladding Safety Victoria has [ranked the 805 buildings](#) according to risk, with “extreme” cases to be rectified first.



 Flammable cladding alight on the Lacrosse building in Victoria's Docklands.



 Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne.

Mr O'Brien said 15 buildings would be fixed this year and another 150 buildings in 2020.

He did not reveal the location of the 15 buildings and Cladding Safety Victoria would not say when asked by *Leader*.

Construction work is about to start on three of the 15 buildings and planning has started on another 11, with consultation expected to get underway on the final building today (Friday October 18).

Cladding Safety Victoria said they were aiming to complete the work as quickly as possible.





The Andrews government in Victoria has announced it will spend \$600 million to deal with the state's flammable cladding ...

Mr O'Brien said 40 per cent of buildings with combustible cladding were three storeys and 93 per cent were under 10 storeys.

"When I came into the job I assumed that most of the problems were going to be with high rise towers but quite the opposite of that," he said.

He said the \$600 million world-first project would only fund cladding removal or replacement from high risk buildings and not other defects.

[MORE: CHARGES LAID OVER FATAL GREENVALE CRASH](#)

[GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR EACH SCHOOL REVEALED](#)

[JAIL FOR 'HEARTBROKEN' ATTACK AFTER CAR BREAKDOWN](#)

He said not all cladding would be removed and in some cases more cost effective performance solutions would be found.

"We are dealing with taxpayers funding so its important that we have the strongest financial controls over each project," he said.

"There will be funding agreements that we will enter into with owners corporations and there will be strict conditions attached ... and there will be strict monitoring of them project by project."

An industry source told the *Leader* he was surprised Mr O'Brien used the asbestos comparison.

"It was a strange link — was he saying that ACP was as toxic as asbestos that has killed thousands people," he said.

About 43 per cent of the 805 building had ACP — a lightweight panel with Polyethylene sandwiched between two pieces of aluminium - and 39 per cent had EPS. The remaining 22 per cent were ambiguous.

jack.paynter@news.com.au