

VIC NEWS

Audit finds hundreds of buildings with dangerous cladding

Hundreds of Victorian buildings have been identified with “extreme or high risk” cladding, as a former premier warns over the scale of the fire-risk crisis.

IAN ROYALL, Sunday Herald Sun

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Almost 500 buildings in Victoria have now been identified as having “extreme or high risk” combustible cladding, according to latest figures from the state’s taskforce.

Experts have assessed more than 2000 private buildings including high-rise towers for the dangerous flammable panels.

The latest data has been revealed amid a warning from former premier Ted Baillieu, who co-chairs

the [Victorian Cladding Taskforce](#), that the state's cladding problems were complex, expensive and would take many years to resolve.

Mr Baillieu told the *Sunday Herald Sun* that audits of buildings were continuing to identify buildings at risk.

“Anybody who thinks there's a smart answer to this is kidding themselves. It's incredibly complex, time-consuming and expensive,” Mr Baillieu said.

The city's apartment market had so far been unaffected by fears of dangerous cladding on homes because of so few sales on affected properties, a Real Estate Institute of Victoria spokeswoman said.

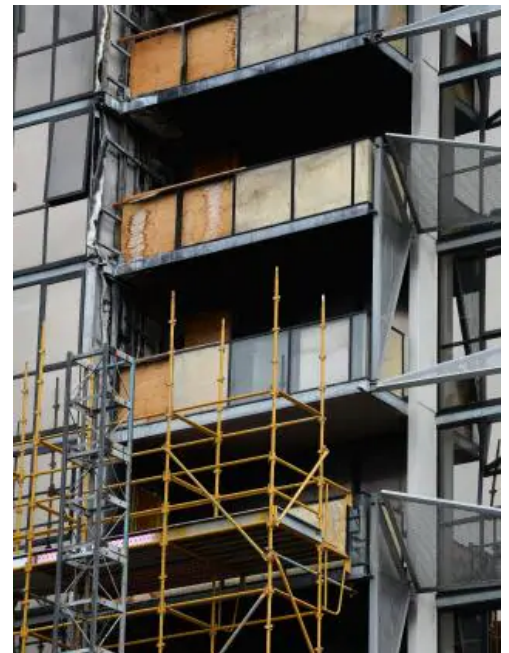
Presence of dangerous cladding now has to be declared in the Section 32 document.

In the audit, more than 70 buildings were at “extreme” risk and another 400 structures were deemed to be in the “high” risk category. The figures mark a 60 per cent increase since the last official data was released in October.

The risk assessment is based on the type of material, how the cladding is fitted and other elements such as evacuation procedures and firefighting provisions.

Government buildings including hospitals and schools were assessed early in the audit process — a total of 360 were inspected — 40 were high risk and repairs had already begun. The last state budget included \$140 million for these buildings.

“The decision making here is much easier because the government owns the buildings,” Mr Baillieu said. “You can't fix anything unless you can get access.”



The fire-damaged apartment complex at the Lacrosse building in Docklands.

Mr Baillieu said the taskforce had three priorities — identify the problem, remove it and then ensure it doesn't happen again.

Rectification costs could total more than \$1 billion in Victoria alone, according to RMIT University researcher Simon Lockrey.



Remains of the Grenfell Tower block in London.

The latest figures come two years since 72 people died in the Grenfell Tower inferno in London and more than four years since flammable cladding fuelled a fire at the Lacrosse building in Docklands.

Mr Baillieu said fixing problems on private buildings was difficult because of the many parties involved — developers, builders, owners corporations, insurance companies, owners and tenants.

“Getting the rectification done is incredibly complex. Every situation is different in terms of decision making and what problems there are.

“And you don't know what you're dealing with until you remove the stuff.”





The state government is believed to dedicating funds to [help apartment owners remove flammable cladding from their homes](#).

Legal changes are also being considered to recoup money from builders who installed dangerous cladding.

Mr Baillieu said Victoria was the only government in the world that had proactively looked for dangerous cladding.

“We’ve been searching for it, not just waiting for people to fess up.”

A new agency, Cladding Safety Victoria, is believed to be soon formally announced. It is not known if the existing taskforce operations will be folded into the new body.

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The Property Council’s Victorian executive director Cressida Wall called for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to meet to resolve the crisis for the building and construction sectors.

“Urgent action is required on cladding in Victoria. Industry is struggling with how best to address this issue and now is the time for leadership from State and Federal Governments.

“The task force is a positive development however more needs to be done to provide certainty for future builds, insurance and existing construction requiring remediation.”

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