

VIC NEWS


Neo200 fire safety engineer in battle to retire

The fire safety engineer who worked on a Melbourne CBD tower before it caught fire is in a legal fight to retire - and says it's not to avoid scrutiny.

ELLEN WHINNETT, Herald Sun

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 The Neo200 building. Picture: The Australian

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The fire safety engineer who worked on the [Neo200 tower](#) before it caught fire has gone to court trying to force the Victorian Building Authority to allow him to retire.

Bruce Thomas is seeking to hand in his qualifications as a fire engineer, a move which would put him out of reach of the VBA, which can only pursue registered practitioners.

The VBA has refused to allow him to hand in his registration, and vowed to continue disciplinary proceedings against him.

But the Supreme Court yesterday sided with Mr Thomas, at least temporarily, ordering the VBA to delay its show-cause proceedings until December 20.

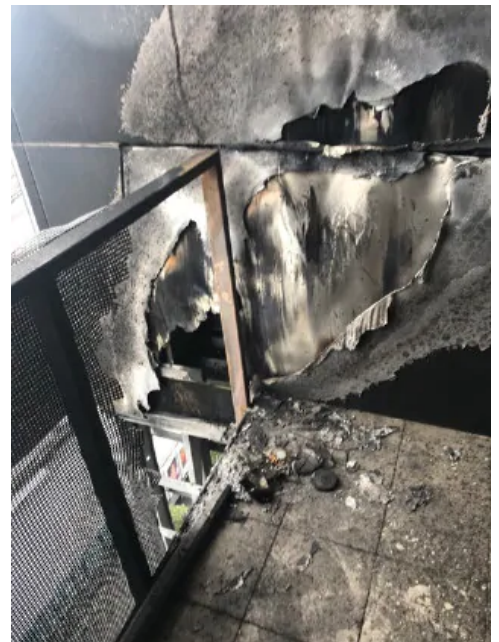
VBA’s chief executive Sue Eddy alleged Mr Thomas’ bid to surrender his registration “appeared to be a deliberate attempt to avoid further scrutiny.”

“In our role to regulate Victoria’s building industry, the VBA’s primary concern is public safety,” Ms Eddy said.

“We don’t believe the community would find it acceptable for the VBA to allow any practitioner to avoid scrutiny and attempt to walk away from their rightful responsibilities by simply handing in their registration.”



The Neo200 apartment building after the blaze. Picture: The Australian



fire damaged balcony.



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But Mr Thomas told the *Herald Sun* yesterday he was simply trying to retire.

He denied he was attempting to avoid scrutiny over the fire, and said the VBA had “got it wrong.”

“I’m nearly 70, I am pushing it. I reached a point where I am looking to retire,” he said.

He said he had sought to surrender his qualifications on April 26, and that the VBA had not started its investigations into him until mid-May.

“I can’t be ducking my responsibilities. At that time I wouldn’t have known,” he said.

He said he refuted all the VBA allegations against him.

The VBA launched disciplinary proceedings against Mr Thomas following a fire at Neo200 in Spencer St in February this year. A carelessly-discarded cigarette ignited flammable cladding on the outside of the 41-story tower. He has been served with a show-cause notice asking why he should not be disciplined.

Mr Thomas’s company, Thomas Nicolas, was the same one employed on the Lacrosse tower in Docklands which also suffered a serious fire spread by flammable cladding in 2014.

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The fire safety engineer on the Lacrosse building, Con Nicolas, is also facing disciplinary action as a result of the fire, although the case has stalled due to problems with the Builders’ Practitioners Board.

The VBA opposed Mr Thomas’ bid to surrender his qualifications as it would prevent the Authority from continuing its disciplinary process against him.

Under the Building Act 1993, the VBA cannot take disciplinary action against a registered building practitioner once their registration had ceased.

“The Neo200 building was the site of a serious cladding fire. The VBA investigation into this matter will identify those responsible and hold them to account,” Ms Eddy said.



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“No one should be allowed to walk away from their responsibilities.”