

NATIONAL VICTORIA SCHOOLS

# Fire risk: Combustible cladding to be removed from 13 state schools

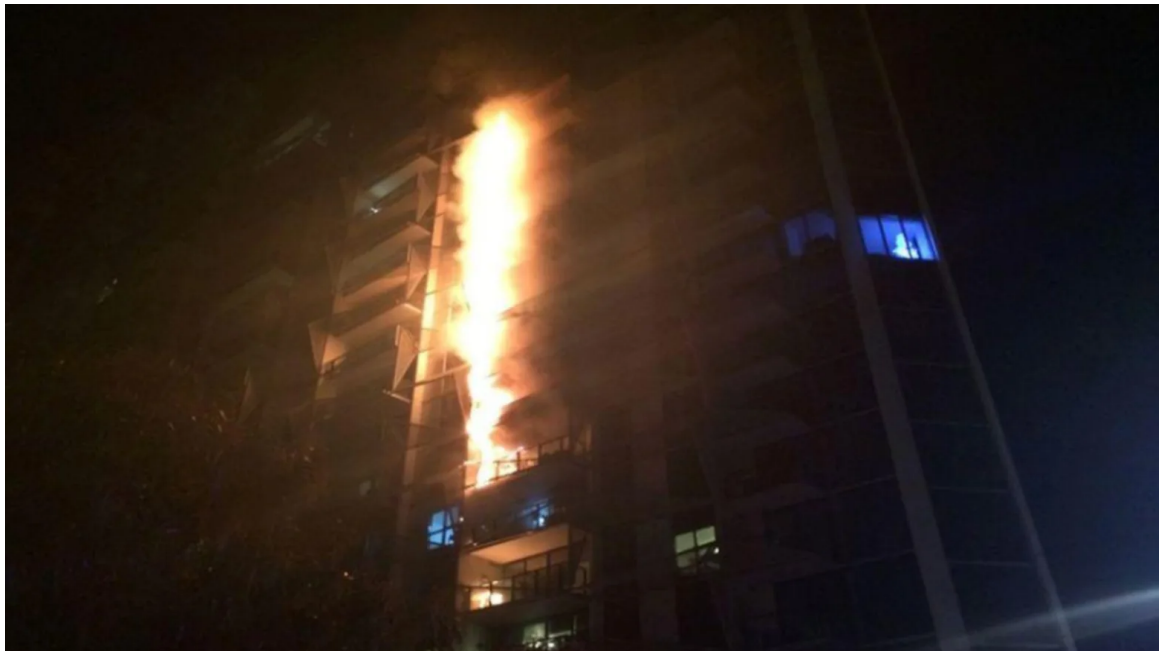
By [Adam Carey](#)

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Flammable cladding will be stripped from 13 government schools in Victoria after being found in a statewide building audit spurred by a major fire at a Docklands tower in 2014.

Twelve schools in metropolitan Melbourne and one in Wodonga are on the list, although the Andrews government would not reveal which schools are affected.



Combustible cladding like that which ignited at the Lacrosse building in Docklands has been found in 13 state schools. BADROCK, GREGORY

Sixteen school buildings, each at least two storeys high, were found to have been built with combustible cladding.

Work to remove the cladding is scheduled to take place between May and September this year.

Sahil Bhasin, national general manager of building inspection company Roscon, said the discovery of combustible cladding at schools should raise alarm bells.

He said the affected buildings would likely be at newer schools in Melbourne's outer suburban growth areas, some of which feature combustible aluminium composite cladding, or potentially on older schools that have recently been renovated.

The product has mostly been in use for about the past 20 years.

Those schools should review their evacuation plans as a matter of urgency, given the cladding is months away from being removed, Mr Bhasin said.

"It is a cause for alarm because aluminium composite panels are mostly used in high-visibility areas like entrances and exits, because of the cost of the product," he said.

"If a child needs to escape they'd be running through an aluminium composite fire, through the entrances of these schools."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Education and Training said the department was committed to ensuring schools were safe for students, parents, teachers and staff.

"The Victorian government is acting to address the important issue of the non-compliant use of some forms of cladding in medium and high-rise buildings in the state, including in our schools," the spokeswoman said.

"In response to the Victorian Cladding Taskforce's recommendations, we're removing non-compliant cladding identified at 13 schools across the state. We will aim to minimise the impact on students and school communities."

Investigations have found there is no known immediate risk to students and teachers at these schools, the spokeswoman said.

The removal work will be outsourced by the Victorian School Building Authority.

Investigations by the Victorian Cladding Taskforce found dangerous materials are widely used on buildings throughout Victoria. It identified 1369 buildings in the state likely to have combustible cladding.

The task force has focused its investigations on buildings constructed after 1997, including apartment buildings, student accommodation, schools, hospitals and aged care facilities.

The state government banned the most dangerous types of combustible cladding last year.

The Lacrosse building in Docklands caught fire in November 2014 when a resident left a cigarette burning in a plastic container.

The flames then spread to the balcony's southern wall, which was covered in aluminium cladding, which is impervious until heat reaches 660 degrees celsius.

Once it had ignited, the fire spread rapidly upwards on the cladding attached to balconies on the 13 floors above.

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No one was injured.

But concerns over cladding escalated dramatically in the wake of London's deadly Grenfell fire – fuelled by the same flammable aluminium cladding – in which 72 people died.



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