

NATIONAL VICTORIA CLADDING CRISIS

'We're getting more stressed': Pensioners' wait for government to fix cladding nightmare

By [Jewel Topsfield](#)

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Ruth Arvidson was jittery when she and her husband Graham left their large Seaford home of 37 years to move into a beachside townhouse.

"I hope we are doing the right thing," she told her husband.

It turned out her nerves were justified.

In June this year the pensioners learnt their Johnson Avenue townhouse in Carrum was covered in combustible cladding.



Ruth and Graham Arvidson are anxious about the future after learning their unit has flammable cladding. SIMON SCHLUTER

"It's been a nightmare," Mr Arvidson said. "This has greatly devalued our property."

In July the Andrews government [announced a \\$600 million package to fund the removal of highly flammable cladding from 500 buildings](#). Each year over five years, 100 buildings are expected to be rectified.

But Mr Arvidson said the process has been shrouded in secrecy and the couple is concerned their townhouse will not be fully covered by the government.

The government has identified 15 buildings which will be the first to be fixed using public funds, but has refused to publicly name them.

The Victorian Statewide Cladding Audit wrote to the Johnson Avenue owners' corporation in July and said it would be contacted in coming weeks about rectification works and eligibility for public funding.

"My wife and I have worked hard all our professional lives and we are now facing financial ruin if we are forced to pay any of the costs of the cladding restoration on our unit," Mr Arvidson said.

He is 72 and his wife 67. "We are getting older and more stressed day by day as this situation continues on unresolved," he said. "Our timeframe is continually shrinking ... we can only see ourselves fighting on for limited years."

Kamran Basiri from company KZB was the building surveyor on the townhouse development. In August, the Victorian Building Authority [suspended Mr Basiri](#), after half a decade of repeatedly prosecuting him for his work.

The builder of the Johnson Avenue townhouses, Emad Farag, was also [suspended](#) by the building authority this year over a string of substandard housing developments.

Mr Farag and Mr Basiri also worked on the notorious [Frankston South apartment block](#) with flammable cladding, which *The Age* has identified as being one of the 15 buildings to be fixed in the first round of repairs.



The Frankston South building is one of the first 15 prioritised for cladding work by the state government. PAUL JEFFERS

Mr Basiri told *The Age* he had not signed off on flammable panelling known as expanded polystyrene.

In an email, he said cladding used on external walls on all blocks should be a fire resistant type known as QT EcoSeries, "as per approved drawings and the builder statement at the end of the project".

Dr Effat Farag, who sold the townhouse to the Arvidsons, said there were no specifications that QT cladding be used on the project.

"I have the drawings and the permit documents and the builder used the exact specifications," Dr Farag said in an email.

He said that at the time expanded polystyrene cladding was used extensively around Melbourne.

On June 21, Kingston Council wrote that an inspection had identified combustible cladding on the townhouse complex and external walls that did not meet Building Code requirements.

"I am of the view that the building is a danger to the life, safety or health of any member of the public or any person using the building," acting municipal building surveyor, Justin Bayard, said in a letter.

Cladding Safety Victoria spokesman John Kent said buildings were prioritised according to risk. He said details would be communicated to affected owners' corporations in coming weeks.

Planning Minister Richard Wynne said every building was assessed on its merits by an independent panel.

"The individual circumstances of each building is being thoroughly reviewed by Cladding Safety Victoria to determine the order in which rectification will occur," Mr Wynne said.

Meanwhile, Mr Arvidson said it was impossible to sell while the cladding was unresolved.

"All we can see ahead of us over the next 15 years is that we are stuck."



Jewel Topsfield



Jewel Topsfield is Melbourne Editor of The Age.
