

VIC NEWS

Growing alarm over dodgy flammable cladding arriving into Victoria

Premier Daniel Andrews fears lives could be lost if the federal government doesn't help resolve Victoria's cladding crisis, after the *Sunday Herald Sun* revealed that counterfeit cladding had been brought into Australia with stickers falsely declaring it to be fire resistant.

Ellen Whinnett, Sunday Herald Sun

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Premier Daniel Andrews has called for the state and federal government to avoid a "blame game" amid the cladding crisis, fearing lives could be lost.

The *Sunday Herald Sun* today revealed that counterfeit cladding falsely marked as being fire resistant had been found in Victoria.

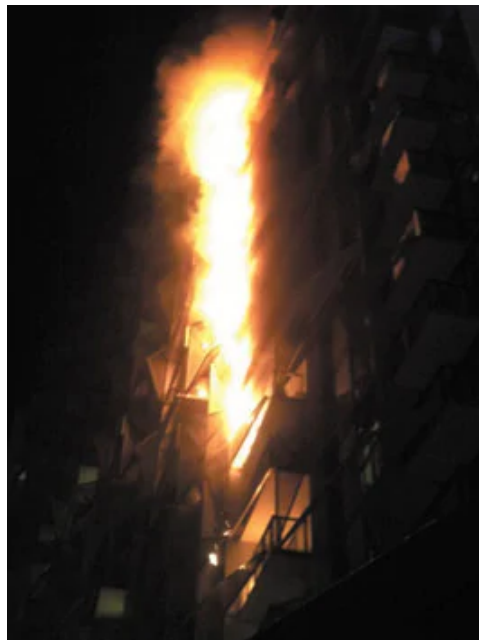
reopened

Mr Andrews said state and federal ministers had been meeting on the cladding crisis, which emerged locally in 2014 when the Lacrosse building went up in flames.

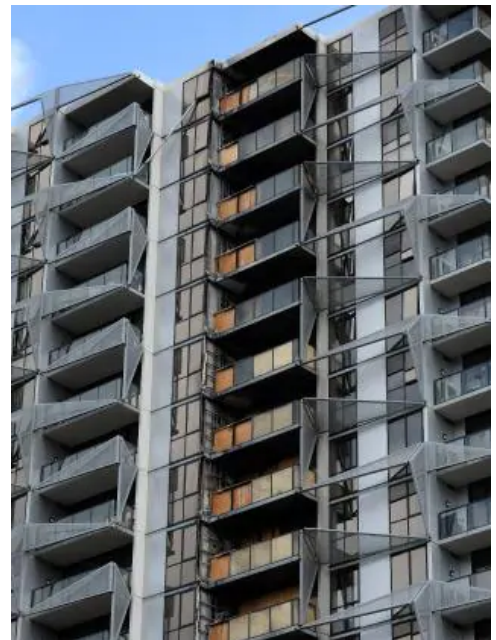
“It is not a partisan point but we, at the time and since, have been really clear the Commonwealth Government need to be a partner in these cladding issues,” he said.

“Importation, issues of custom, issues of product safety, labelling are not handled at a state level.”

He added: “If ignored, if a blame game was to erupt or if you were to simply be interested in admiring the problem, rather of taking action to fix it, my fear is that there would be deadly outcomes.”



The Lacrosse building fire in Docklands.



The fire-damaged Lacrosse building in Docklands. Picture: Steve Tanner

Mr Andrews said governments were also attempting to crack down on “phoenixing companies” that disappear so there was no one “to go after” over potentially dodgy building works.

But Opposition planning spokesman Tim Smith said the Andrews Government had “for months been trying to deflect” its failure to act on the cladding crisis.

“This desperate attempt today is yet another example,” he said.

“The federal government is not responsible for what is built in Victoria, Daniel Andrews is, and this Labor government and their appalling regulator the VBA have failed innocent Victorians allowing thousands of apartments to be built as deadly fire traps.”

Reports of the dodgy products with fake authorisation stickers has caused concern across the building industry.

The [flammable cladding](#) is likely to have been manufactured in China and imported into Australia untested and undetected.



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The Victorian Building Authority is understood to be aware of reports of counterfeiting or substitution — where inferior, [flammable cladding](#) was used instead of better quality, safer panels.

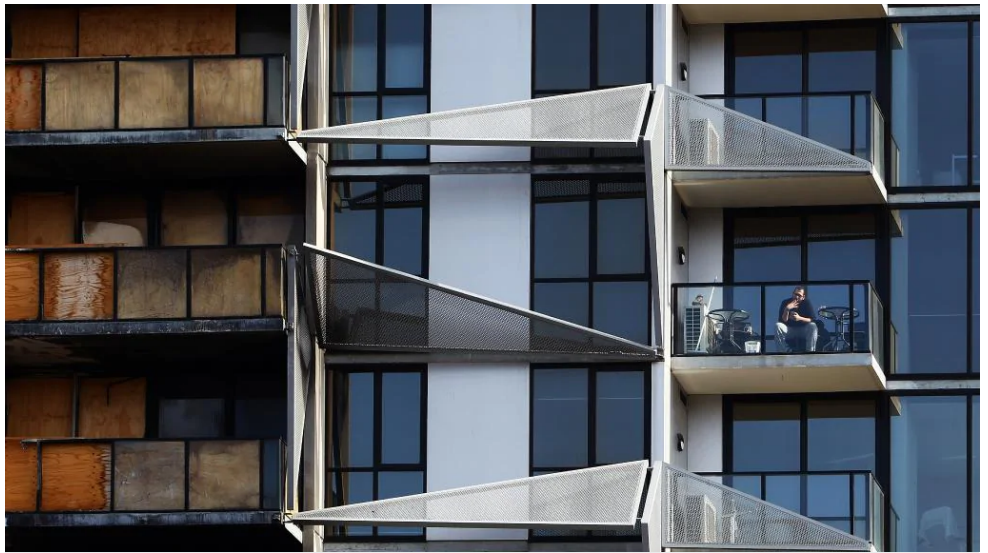
The Master Builders Association of Victoria is also aware of reports of cladding being brought into Australia with stickers falsely declaring them to be fire resistant.

It is not known how many instances, if any, have been uncovered of counterfeit cladding — which could include flammable materials or glues — being installed on Victorian buildings.

CEO of Master Builders Victoria, Rebecca Casson, said there were reports of counterfeit cladding being imported into Australia, as well as other countries.

“There can be imitation product where a sticker is put on and it says it meets a particular standard,” she said.

“If there is such a product, we don’t believe they are official stickers as such.”



The Lacrosse building that suffered extensive damage in a fire. Picture: Nicole Garmston

They are calling on the Federal Government to audit and test products being imported.

“There needs to be an overhaul of the current auditing system to ensure the product is not getting into the country,” she said.

“The issue at the moment, the counterfeit products that are coming into Australia, is a federal issue.”

The reports have emerged as the Victorian Government continues its audit of the use of non-compliant cladding, with around 1400 buildings identified so far. More than 400 private buildings are considered to be high-risk.

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The cladding crisis in Victoria was sparked by fires at the Lacrosse and Neo200 buildings in Melbourne.

Ms Casson said while there was “scant information on the provenance of the product ... there’s definitely a general sense it’s coming from the overseas market.”

Ms Casson said builders who had any concerns should contact them and get expert advice.

A VBA spokeswoman said of the counterfeits: “We take such claims seriously and they should be reported to all relevant state and federal bodies.”

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