

POLITICS VICTORIA EDITORIAL

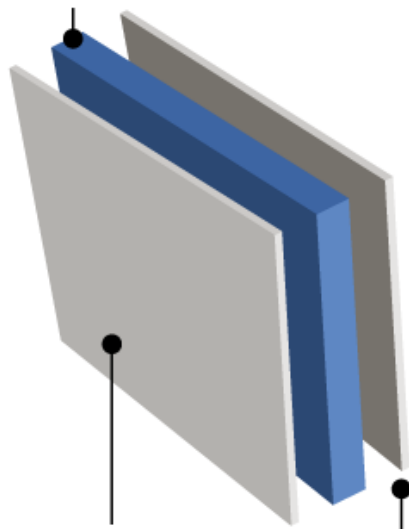
The state government has made the right call on cladding

July 16, 2019 – 11.45pm

The Victorian government is to be applauded for its [initiative in tackling the cladding crisis](#) in this state. Flammable cladding on buildings is a national problem, but Victoria will be the first state to foot the bill for repairs.

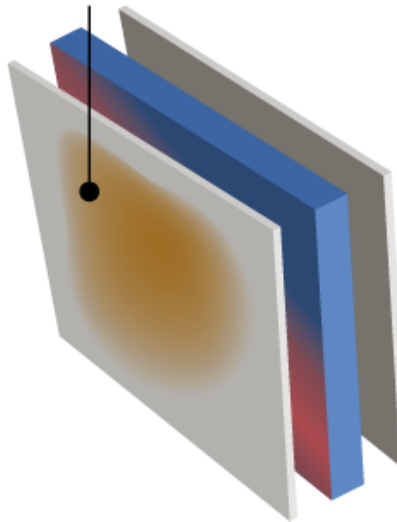
Aluminium composite cladding panel Flammable core

Insulating core
2-5mm thick,
100% polyethylene



Surfaces
0.5mm thick
aluminium skin

Heat from a fire will
conduct quickly to the
core through thin
aluminium



Core loses ability to
bind, causing outer
skins to deform and
delaminate



Core melts
and can ignite

Graphic: Jamie Brown

The move gives residents, in particular, and anyone who saw the images of three apartment buildings on fire in Melbourne in the past five years, some assurance that the hazardous situation is being tackled. How deadly the problem can be was tragically illustrated in the Grenfell Tower fire in London in 2017, when 72 people died. Thankfully, that is not the case here.

Premier Daniel Andrews announced yesterday a \$600 million package towards fixing the problem of flammable cladding on private properties. It's a start, and a welcome one, but it's just a start. Planners at RMIT University this year found that the repair bill for all of the state's apartments with flammable cladding would be more than \$1.6 billion.

The \$600 million will be administered by a new agency, Cladding Safety Victoria. The state asked Canberra to match its commitment, but it has refused, leaving Victoria to raise the shortfall by increasing levies on building permits for the next five years. The levy would apply only to buildings worth more than \$800,000.

In refusing to underwrite Victoria's bailout, the Morrison government argues that compliance is a state-regulated issue and that the states have the means to raise funds to cover the costs. This may be so, but the Commonwealth does have a role to play – in managing the nationwide insurance crisis, and in dealing with the problem at its source: the cheap, flammable building materials imported into the country. The federal government is responsible for stopping the arrival of these materials in the first place – a task at which it clearly has failed.

It is regrettable, too, that taxpayers must now cough up to cover for the appallingly inadequate policing of state building regulations. The state government must continue pursuing those builders and developers who “had done the wrong thing”. And it is unconscionable that residents should have to cover any of the repair costs when a dangerous material is used without their knowledge.

The gravity and extent of the crisis was shown in statistics from the Victorian Cladding Taskforce, headed by former premier Ted Baillieu. Of more than 2200 buildings inspected, almost half – 40 per cent – were at high risk.

In the May state budget, \$160 million was set aside for the next four years to repair 95 government buildings. More than \$5 million had already been spent fixing 22 assessed as the most dangerous. This package is aimed at 500 buildings. Clearly, more funding will be needed.

The safety of apartment residents and office workers is paramount, but the cladding issue also has had serious implications for the building industry. It is a reflection of the ad hoc approach to compliance and enforcement of building regulations across state and federal jurisdictions. Federal Industry Minister Karen Andrews will meet state and territory counterparts tomorrow to propose that a taskforce be established to look into a national framework.

Doing the repairs is essential. Ensuring non-compliant cladding is never used again will prevent the problem in the first place.