

GOLD COAST

Cladding under review at major Gold Coast buildings

The Q1 and major hospitals are among the 677 buildings on the Gold Coast that will have to be reviewed as part of the combustible cladding audit but one supplier says people are being unnecessarily scared by the process.

Kirstin Payne, Gold Coast Bulletin

| June 20, 2019 12:00am



THE iconic Q1 and the city’s two public hospitals are among the 677 buildings on the Gold Coast that will have to be reviewed as part of the combustible cladding audit.

However, one cladding supplier says property owners are being unnecessarily scared by the process because the materials have already been approved under current Queensland building regulations and approved in other states such as NSW.

In turn, fire engineers say the review is vital to ensure the cladding was installed properly and does not pose a fire hazard.

To quell fears, a leading expert said the biggest concern was not always the material itself but how it could have been fitted.



General pictures of the Robina Hospital

The State Government is conducting a three-step process to determine which buildings have the combustible cladding. It is looking for products that has polyethylene, zinc and copper, among others.

The cladding that turned the Grenfell tower in London into an inferno, killing 72 people in 2017, was an aluminium panel with a 100 per cent polyethylene core.

More than 5000 buildings across Queensland, 677 of which are on the Gold Coast, must undergo an independent audit as part of stage two of the Safer Buildings checklist. Each inspection will cost an estimated \$4000.

Daron Hodder has been supplying cladding to buildings across Queensland for more than 27 years, including the Q1 and Robina Hospital. His cladding, Mitsubishi Alpolic FR, has 30 per cent polyethylene and is approved for use in NSW and other states.


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The director of ACLAD estimates 1 million square metres of the product exists on buildings in southeast Queensland alone. He insists it is safe, but would fail an isolated small-scale test required under the government's checklist.

The test alone does not determine the safety of the building and the audit does not require rectification works.

“The issue is massive,” he said. “My main concern is people thinking they have dangerous cladding when that isn't that case. I urge the government to provide us with clarity and allow for full-wall tests.”



 June 14, 2019 marks 24 months since a small kitchen fire in a west London high-rise turned into the most deadly domestic blaze since the Second World War. (Photo by Daniel LEAL-OLIVAS P)

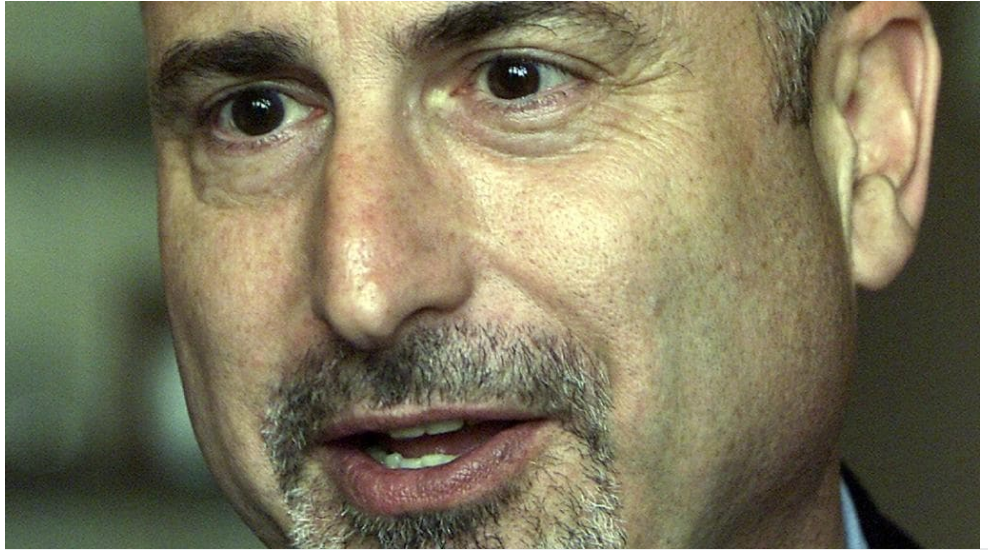
A small-scale test, called AS1530.1, is when a piece of cladding is set alight. A full-wall test, called an AS5113, is when a full wall of cladding is exposed to heat higher than 700 degrees Celsius. These tests can only be done in Sydney and Melbourne and can cost up to \$60,000.

“Why is Queensland identifying cladding approved elsewhere as unsafe?” Mr Hooder asked.

Jonathan Barnett, a leading Australian fire engineer and the director of Basic Expert, said problems with cladding products stemmed from the incorrect installation and certification, not the product alone.

“This cladding has always been seen as combustible, its use determines safety,” he said.

“Deciding where it is safe or not under Queensland building codes is dependent on what is behind (the cladding), which is why the assessment by fire safety engineers has to take place as part of stage three of the checklist.”



Professor Jonathan Barnett of Basic Expert, a leading cladding and fire safety expert.

Dr Barnett was supportive of the review and did not want a uniform acceptance of certain materials.

“If I am unsure (of the cladding) I will do a test. What I can’t do is say it is safe if I am not absolutely sure because a mistake could kill someone.”

The Queensland Building and Construction Commission said it was aware of Mr Hodder’s calls to rule certain types of cladding as safe, but a thorough investigation of all buildings was needed.

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“The Safer Buildings Program is a multi-step audit,” a spokesman said. “For those buildings that reach the end of part three of the process, fire engineers will be asked to provide expert advice as to whether those particular buildings give rise to ongoing concerns.

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“The QBCC has not made any broadbrush determinations that any particular commercial brand of cladding ... will require removal.”

According to Gold Coast Health an audit of all buildings was being undertaken and 80 per cent complete.

Two localised areas of cladding at the the Gold Coast University Hospital require further investigation.

“The sections are not in patient-contact areas and the materials in question are not high-risk materials,” the spokeswoman said.

The Gold Coast Bulletin approached Q1 body corporate for comment. They did not reply.