



Cladding: What do Owners Committees need to know?

The Strength of **Experience.**

The issue of highly combustible cladding usage in high-rise buildings was most recently highlighted in February 2019, when the Melbourne Neo 200 building caught fire from a lit cigarette on a balcony, causing an instant blaze. In June 2017, a fire tore up London's 24-storey Grenfell tower, leading to 72 deaths. In November 2014, a fire raced up 13 levels of the Lacrosse building, which had similar cladding, in Melbourne's Docklands in just 10 minutes, forcing the evacuation of more than 500 people.

Learning from past incidents, Australian state governments have already banned the use of combustible cladding such as Aluminium Composite Panels (ACPs) and other metal panels with polymer cores and have called for their immediate replacement with safer alternatives.

The bottom line for owners is that they are ultimately responsible for making their buildings safe. All bodies corporate must be aware of the composition and suitability of materials used in the construction of their building. Further, if you have discovered that your property contains noncompliant cladding, you should notify your insurer.

What should you do?

Know your state regulations: Rules in New South Wales include mandatory registration for all commercial, residential and mixed-use buildings that contain combustible cladding and are two stories and above. In Queensland, owners are required to follow a compulsory checklist regarding cladding material in use and comply with a two-stage assessment of their buildings. In Victoria, a ban has been issued on the use of both ACP and Expanded Polystyrene (EPS). In addition, the Minister for Planning is appointing the [Victorian Building Authority \(VBA\)](#) as Municipal Building Surveyor (MBS) on buildings affected by non-compliant cladding. Owners are being contacted to be advised that the VBA is now the MBS for their building. [Read this article](#) to learn more about the cladding regulations in your state.



Have your building assessed: Risk assessment is key. It is important for you to know what kind of cladding material is used in your building, how safe it is by National Construction Code fire-safety standards, how to remove or replace it with safer alternatives, and what to do in case of emergencies. [Follow this three-step process](#) to identify and evaluate your building's exposure.



Retain a copy of inspection and certification documentation for compliance checks: If you're unsure of the process and requirements, your strata manager can assist to get your building's registration, cladding checklist and assessment in order. Keep track of government-specified deadlines so you don't end up paying huge fines. If you're in Victoria, your owners corporation will be [notified by inspectors](#) before your building is due for assessment. An inspector will also provide reports for further assessment by a fire-safety panel.



Enforce fire-safety measures: Have you got enough fire-safety equipment and warning notices in place? Are they in visible and accessible areas of your property? Are you conducting regular fire-checks and drills? Making fire-safety a priority can make all the difference for your property. You should also take care to remember keeping fire-exits unblocked by vehicles and common areas uncluttered during emergencies.

Follow these fire safety actions to reduce the risk of fire:

- › Extinguish cigarettes safely.
- › Keep hallways clear to avoid obstructing occupants needing to exit the building.
- › Do not cover air-conditioning units with clothes or other materials.
- › Keep balconies clear of clutter and material such as clothing, boxes or rubbish.
- › Do not use barbeques and heaters on balconies near potentially combustible material.
- › Ensure smoke alarms inside apartments are not covered or disconnected.
- › Keep fire stairwells and landings clear and do not store items within them.

Evaluate your insurance: Find out what kind of insurance policies have been taken out for your building. Evaluate insurance policies from specialist strata providers to insure your own property.

Why does your insurer need to ask so many questions?

With so many varieties of ACP, it's very important that insurers keep records on the certification of products along with the cladding material banned in each state. The more information insurers know about who installed it, when it was installed, what was installed, and where it was installed – the more of a calculated judgement they can make in providing appropriate guidance on insurance cover.

Here are some suggested questions for owners to ask their Committees:

- › How do we find out if we have non-compliant cladding on our building?
- › Who do we have to tell about it?
- › How do we get the funds to investigate and repair?
- › Who is responsible? Will they contribute to the cost to repair?

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