

Property News

# Leaders Call for Action as Full Cladding Debacle Exposed

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**Industry leaders are calling for national action following revelations that problems with non-compliant cladding have been known for decades.**

Following the airing of a Four Corners report which revealed that the industry has known about the problem of non-compliant cladding for the best part of a decade, leaders throughout the property and construction industry have called for action.

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Strata Community Australia said it is possible that hundreds if not thousands of buildings around Australia might possess similar aluminum



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SCA hit out at the lack of action on the part of the Federal Government that it would not consider tougher screening measures at the border.

“Our fear is that tens of thousands of apartment owners around the country, could be left to face this serious safety threat alone, and we want to see Federal Government intervention ASAP,” a national spokesperson said.

“Last week the Federal Government announced that it will not consider tougher screening measures at the border to stop unsafe building materials, and lieu of this decision, we want to hear from the Prime Minister on what action his government will be considering.”

Builders Collective of Australia national president Phil Dwyer said the problems were part of a broader lack of industry management and accountability.

Too often, he says, performance solutions (as opposed to deemed-to-satisfy solutions) are being used to certify products and uses of products in questionable circumstances.

“It comes back to the management of our industry,” Dwyer said.

“That’s where governments have failed us.”

“We seem to be able to turn around and make something that is non-compliant – we can turn around and say it’s ‘deemed-to-satisfy’ and so on and therefore it’s compliant.

“We’ve got this ridiculous situation of almost anything can be made compliant and it’s through the performance based system. And somebody turns around and says ‘I think that’s OK and so on.

“All of the sudden it becomes compliant. It’s a ridiculous situation.”

The latest comments follow revelations on the ABC’s Four Corners program that problems associated with aluminium composite panels with a polyethylene core have been known for more than a decade.

The program revealed that:

- companies continued to import and install PE containing cladding despite Japanese company Mitsubishi having warned as far back as the Year 2000 that fire tests had shown that PE containing cladding was highly flammable and dangerous.
- There was a lack of knowledge and expertise requirements as to who can install cladding on buildings.
- There was a lack of industry accountability and enforcement of the National Construction Code and a lot of ‘finger pointing’ in respect of

The issue of non-compliant cladding on buildings was brought to public attention when fire ripped up fifteen floors of the Lacrosse apartment complex in Docklands.

Queensland has now introduced legislation to make all players within the supply chain responsible for any use of non-compliant products which go into buildings.

Engineers Australia Victorian President Chris Stoltz says the issue has been one which the engineering profession has been talking about for some time and that there were multiple issues which need to be addressed.

First, Stoltz cautions that whilst much of the media focus had revolved around cladding and imported products, the broader issue of non-compliant products extends beyond this.

Indeed, the Senate Inquiry into Non-Conforming Products was established not in response to cladding issues but rather in response to the discovery of thousands of faulty electrical cables which went into homes and businesses throughout Australia.

As for the focus on products being imported, Stoltz says products made in Australia are just as capable of being either manufactured or used in a way which is not fit-for-purpose as is the case with those which come from overseas.

At the core of the problem, Stoltz says, Australia is failing in the task of designing buildings which meet standards required within the NCC and then delivering upon buildings which meet those standards in construction.

In this regard, he says there are several issues.

First, without being critical of building surveyors, he says too many demands and too much reliance is being placed upon building surveyors, who are often being expected to perform tasks beyond their expertise and are being subject to expectations beyond what is practically possible given that it is not possible for them to physically supervise every aspect of the building process.

Engineers, too, are being asked to certify structural components even though they might not have expertise in this area.

A further problem, Stoltz said, is that many roles within both the government and private sector which used to be performed by engineers have been 'de-engineered' and are now being performed by non-engineers who may not have the necessary experience to do that.

Going forward, Stoltz says two issues need to be resolved: what immediately needed to be done about Melbourne's Lacrosse building (in which combustible cladding which facilitated the rapid spread of fire was still there) and the longer-term issues about how problems need to be addressed.

On the former issue, Stoltz says the government should consider providing financial assistance to owners who have to replace their cladding.

Longer term, he talks of a need for the right people to be trained and for appropriate enforcement action from adequately resourced regulators.

Still, not all are alarmed.

Property Council of Australia chief executive officer Ken Morrison said action had been happening on a number of fronts.

Morrison said Australia had some of the best fire safety standards in the world, and that Australians can be confident that we don't have buildings with the multiple failures associated with Grenfell.

"We are seeing concerted and considered action from the Building Ministers Forum, the Senior Officers' Group on NCBPs, the Australian Building Codes Board, Standards Australia, as well as state governments and their relevant fire and consumer protection agencies. As well, the Senate has been inquiring into NCBPs since 2015 and is expected to report this week.

"Last Month, the Australian Building Codes Board released an out-of-cycle amendment for the National Construction Code and this week the Senate is reporting on its own inquiry into NCBP. The amendment includes a new Verification Method for external wall assemblies, increased stringency for sprinkler protection of balconies, clarifying language in the Code for external wall claddings and revision of the National Construction Code's evidence of suitability provisions."

"Certainly, the Grenfell building was a disaster waiting to happen with multiple failures – flammable cladding, no sprinkler systems, single fire stairs and no building alarm. The public can have confidence that we do not build buildings like this in Australia."



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