

## Queensland bodies corporate may have pay to rip out combustible cladding once deemed safe

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PHOTO: It is not known how many non-government buildings in Queensland have the unsafe cladding (ABC News: Isobel Roe)

**Queenslanders living in body corporate-run apartment blocks could be forced to pay for new safety audits and pick up multi-million-dollar tabs for ripping out combustible cladding in buildings that have previously been ticked off as safe.**

The ABC's Four Corners program has revealed more than a decade before a deadly fire in London, Australian suppliers of aluminium-composite cladding knew the product they were selling with a polyethylene (PE) core was highly flammable.

It is not known how many non-government buildings in Queensland have the unsafe cladding, but 40 government-owned buildings are under investigation and Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital has already been found to be a potential fire risk.

Strata Community Australia director Simon Barnard said bodies corporate across the country could be forced to increase fees to pay for new safety audits and if cladding was found, pay millions in remediation.

"Who's going to pick up the tab for the expensive and dangerous headache of dealing with this product?" he said.

"It comes down to the lot owner having to pick up the tab.

"In most cases they wouldn't have the funds to do so."

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**PHOTO:** Brisbane real estate agent Nick Buick said many building owners were yet to hire inspectors to re-do safety audits. (ABC News: Isobel Roe)

The cheap PE core cladding continued to be installed on medium and high-rise buildings in Australia until 2013.

Brisbane-based fire engineer Chris Sheeran said the industry had recognised that buildings already ticked off as safe might not be.

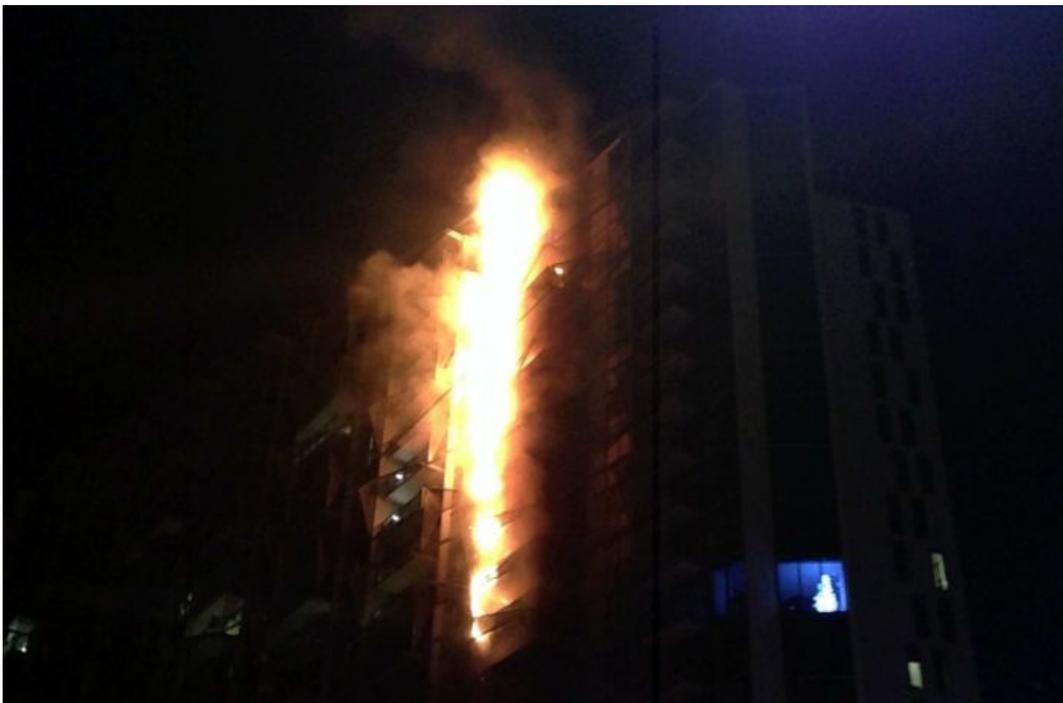
"People who have come and given that check, they might have checked all other aspects but would not have looked at [cladding] because all of this is coming up in light of the tragedies that have happened," he said.

"People cannot look at their product or do a backyard test.

"It needs to be subject to not any lab, a lab that has been approved to undergo those tests.

"The Building Code of Australia is very clear on that."

A laboratory in Melbourne is the only one in Australia accredited to test the product.



**PHOTO:** Aluminium-composite cladding was used on the Lacrosse building that caught fire in 2014. (Audience submitted: Wade Savage)

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Mr Barnard believes after the massive publicity surrounding the Grenfell fire in London, no body corporate could claim they did not know about the cladding scandal.

"We would encourage any body corporate as part of its obligations to maintain common property to be aware of what's on their building," he said.

Strata Community Australia wants the Queensland Government to identify who should pay for any remediation costs, to prevent them falling to unit owners.

Brisbane real estate agent and building marketer Nick Buick said the issue was still unfolding in the building management industry, but a 2014 apartment fire in Melbourne showed how much the fallout could cost.

"In Lacrosse in Victoria, it was \$15 million to remediate that building," he said.

"Spread between 400 owners in that building, that's \$50,000 an owner."

Mr Barnard said some insurers had already moved to change their policy surrounding the cladding.

"We're aware that the insurers are already looking at [bodies corporate] having to declare whether they do or do not have this product to obtain their reinsurance that they must have under legislation," he said.

A spokesman for the Government's audit taskforce set up to investigate the issue said private buildings were the responsibility of the Queensland Building and Construction Commission (QBCC).

"Where there is a concern with privately owned buildings, the QBCC contacts the owners in every case and requests documentation to clarify the type of material installed," the spokesman said.

"Where there is confirmation of potentially combustible material, the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service will be notified to assess the appropriate level of response."

**Watch Four Corners' report on flammable cladding on ABC iview.**

**Topics:** building-and-construction, fires, regulation, law-crime-and-justice, laws, activism-and-lobbying, government-and-politics, brisbane-4000, qld, australia, united-kingdom

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## How did the Grenfell fire spread so quickly?



And how can landlords and local councils act now to help prevent another disaster?



**PHOTO:** In the wake of London's Grenfell fire, Australian states began conducting building audits. (AP: Matt Dunham)