

# Victorian Cladding Taskforce Advisory Note

## Advisory Note 1: Fire Safety Actions for Residents, Building Owners, Owners' Corporations and Facilities Managers

28 September 2017

The Victorian Cladding Taskforce has been established to:

- Investigate the extent of non-compliant and non-conforming external cladding on Victorian buildings;
- Advise on the rectification of non-compliant and non-conforming external cladding; and
- Recommend changes to the regulatory system.

The tragic Grenfell Tower fire in the UK in June and the 2014 fire at the Lacrosse building in Docklands have highlighted the fire safety risks arising from non-compliant cladding as external wall covering on high-rise buildings.

Of particular concern are Aluminium Composite Panels (ACP) with a polyethylene core. This type of cladding has been implicated at Grenfell and Lacrosse and is combustible. Rendered expanded polystyrene cladding (EPS) is also of concern.

In Australia, the rules about how buildings must be constructed are set out in The National Construction Code (NCC). The NCC requires that external walls of buildings, three storeys and above, must be non-combustible (if it is to be deemed-to-satisfy). This includes cladding affixed to or forming part of an external wall.

### Audit of non-compliant external cladding

A non-compliant use of a building product is when a product is used in situations where it does not comply with the requirements of the NCC.

An audit undertaken by the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) identified a number of buildings in inner Melbourne with non-compliant external cladding. These buildings are being monitored by the relevant local councils, the VBA and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and are deemed safe to occupy.

The initial focus of the Taskforce will involve assessing the external cladding on residential buildings and accommodation three storeys and above – hospitals and nursing homes are also in scope.

Due to the scale and complexity of the task, the audit may take considerable time.

Further information will be provided as the work of the Taskforce progresses:

[www.planning.vic.gov.au/building-policy/victorian-cladding-taskforce](http://www.planning.vic.gov.au/building-policy/victorian-cladding-taskforce)

Regardless of what materials are used on your building, now is a good time to review the fire safety features and procedures for your building.

## Recommended Fire Safety Actions for residents

When reporting a fire-safety issue, excluding a fire emergency, these authorities should be contacted in the following order:

1. Owners' corporation or rental manager
2. Local council
3. Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) [www.mfb.vic.gov.au](http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au) or Country Fire Authority (CFA) [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)

## 2. Best practice check list

- Ensure all smoke alarms are in place, not obstructed and in working order.
- Adopt good housekeeping measures to ensure combustible waste or combustible materials are not stored at ground level or on any balcony.
- Remove any waste or combustible materials near the cladding or any temporary barriers, such as combustible blinds or awnings.
- Check fire doors are not blocked, are open to escape corridors and stairways and are fire resistant and self-closing.
- Be familiar with a fire safety procedures and your building's fire plans for escape.

Ensure you manage fire risks within your home. For more advice, consult the MFB Home Fire Safety Booklet:

[www.mfb.vic.gov.au/Community/Home-Safety/Booklet.html](http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au/Community/Home-Safety/Booklet.html)

## 3. Fire safety on balconies

Keep balcony furniture away from exterior walls.

Keep goods, materials and clothes drying on a balcony a safe distance of 1 metre clear of from air conditioning units.

Where a barbeque is allowed, maintain a safe distance of 50cm from exterior walls, separating walls, anything else that could burn, as well as any electrical ignition sources.

Store gas bottles outside and upright away from heat sources.

Smokers should use heavy, high-sided ashtrays made from glass, enamel or metal to prevent them from tipping over and cigarettes should be fully extinguished.

Keep a dry powder fire extinguisher easily accessible. Use only in case of a small fire and if you feel physically and mentally able.

Visual guidelines for fire safety on balconies are available at:

- [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/fire-safety-balconies.pdf](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/fire-safety-balconies.pdf)
- [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/home-fire-safety-checklist/](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/home-fire-safety-checklist/)

# Recommended Fire Safety Actions for owners' corporations, building owners and facilities managers

## 1. General building safety and risk assessment

All multi-storey buildings are fitted with fire safety features which are referred to in the Victorian Building Regulations as Essential Safety Measures (ESM). ESM include a number of matters required for the safety of persons using a building, as specified in the Building Regulations. See: [www.vba.vic.gov.au/consumer-resources/building/pages/essential-safety-measures](http://www.vba.vic.gov.au/consumer-resources/building/pages/essential-safety-measures).

External walls or cladding may be listed specifically or described by reference to the relevant part of the NCC.

ESM for your building are listed in the occupancy permit for the building, or in a maintenance determination issued under the Building Regulations. These documents should be displayed in the building.

The Regulations require the owner of a building to ensure an Essential Safety Measures Report is prepared annually. The report is an annual declaration that all ESM have been maintained as required. **It is a criminal offence if an essential safety measures report is not prepared annually.** A penalty of up to \$1585.70 applies, which may be applied to each residence owner.

Owners' corporations, building owners and facilities managers must produce an annual Essential Safety Measures Report and any records of maintenance of ESM to a Municipal Building Surveyor, or a chief officer of the MFB or CFA for inspection, within 24 hours of any request.

External walls of high-rise buildings may be non-compliant if they have combustible components. External walls can be part of the ESM for the purpose of the Building Regulations (this includes external wall cladding affixed to or forming part of an external wall).

Even if external walls or external cladding is not included as an ESM in the occupancy permit, or in a maintenance determination, The Taskforce recommends the annual Essential Safety Measures Report include it.

## 2. Fire extinguishers and hose reels

Fire extinguishers and hose reels are ESM installed in a building to facilitate firefighting from inside the building. Fire extinguishers should be maintained, correctly marked and located near any risk areas and exit routes.

Hose reels should be maintained as specified in the occupancy permit or by the manufacturer, to the satisfaction of the MFB and the CFA.

All first aid fire-fighting equipment such as fire extinguishers and fire hose reels should only be used if the operator feels physically and mentally able.

### 3. Check smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are an ESM. Smoke alarms should be checked annually and detection systems should be maintained and not tampered with or restricted in any way.

The MFB has developed a brochure for building owners and occupiers of buildings where fire alarm systems are installed. See:

[www.mfb.vic.gov.au/Media/docs/LivingWithAFAS1-c93d726d-f537-4cfc-8fea-bd3b0012d811.pdf](http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au/Media/docs/LivingWithAFAS1-c93d726d-f537-4cfc-8fea-bd3b0012d811.pdf)

### 4. Checklist for fire safety

The Taskforce recommends that building owners, owners' corporations and facilities managers undertake the following fire safety actions to reduce fire risk:

- Confirm no material changes have been made (such as a facade upgrade) to the exterior of the building or the balconies, that may compromise fire safety or a fire safety assessment conducted prior to the works being performed.
- Make sure residents know and understand the fire safety procedures for the building. Owners' corporations, building owners, facilities managers and residents should develop a tailored fire evacuation plan, fire orders and emergency evacuation procedures.
- Advise residents to remove combustible materials and waste at ground level and remind them not to store combustible materials and waste on a balcony.
- Advise residents to remove any flammable liquids, temporary barriers, blinds or awnings, or other combustible items (e.g. clothes horses) that are close to external cladding.
- Advise residents that, where barbeques are permitted on balconies, to ensure they are at least 50cm from exterior walls, separating walls, anything else that could burn, as well as power points or other possible sources of ignition.
- Check fire doors are not damaged, are unobstructed and open to escape corridors. Ensure stairways and associated doors are fire resistant and doors are self-closing.
- Check that fire facilities such as an external hydrant are accessible to firefighters. If you are unsure you can arrange an MFB inspection by calling the **MFB on (03) 9665 4478** or the **CFA on (03) 9262 8444**.
- Maintain all roadways and access areas to ensure clear access for the fire brigade in any emergency.