

FAQs

April 2020

Why are you still inspecting buildings?

The Victorian Building Authority's key objective is ensuring public and community safety. Which is why an authorised inspector needs to undertake an on-site inspection of your building to check the outside walls for combustible cladding and review the building's fire safety measures.

The VBA is taking the health of residents and our staff very seriously. We have implemented additional safety precautions to ensure that we minimise any potential risks associated with COVID-19 whilst ensuring that our team is able to undertake our vital work.

What steps are you taking to minimise the risk of residents contracting COVID-19?

By wearing appropriate safety equipment and limiting any unnecessary contact between residents and inspectors, we are reducing the risk of contracting COVID-19 for both residents and inspectors. It is particularly important that we are made aware of any residents who are self-isolating as this will enable us to further minimise any avoidable potential risks.

Can you confirm that your inspectors are free of COVID-19?

The VBA is taking the health of our staff and anyone who comes into contact with our staff very seriously. We are closely following the Department of Health and Human Services' advice on when employees should stay home from work and when they need to self-isolate, and we have educated our inspectors about this matter.

Unfortunately we cannot guarantee that all of our inspectors have not unknowingly been infected by the virus, especially with symptoms taking some time to show up.

However, there are steps we can all take to reduce the risk of infection. We encourage everyone to wash their hands often – this applies to inspectors and residents of buildings. Hand washing is especially important after coming into contact with surfaces in public places, and is one of the best things anyone can do to reduce their exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Our inspectors will also be maintaining the recommended social distancing guidelines.

Why are your inspectors wearing such substantial PPE?

We have provided our inspectors with the equipment that will help them to remain safe in their jobs at this time, and to increase the safety of building residents. It doesn't mean that we believe they are personally at increased risk of contracting or passing on COVID-19.

We would rather you didn't enter our building for an inspection at this time. Can we cancel or postpone the inspection?

The VBA's key objective is minimising the fire safety risk of buildings across Victoria, and inspections play an essential role in keeping residents and the broader community safe. We have implemented additional safety precautions during this period to minimise risks related to COVID-19 to both residents and inspectors, and only where we deem the risk to be unacceptably high are we able to postpone an inspection.

It is for this reason that we ask OC Managers to please let us know as soon as possible if they are aware of any residents who, within the 14 days prior to a scheduled inspection, fall within the following categories: (1) International travellers; (2) those who have come into contact with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19; or (3) people with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.

What will happen during this inspection?

The inspection that needs to be undertaken may include:

- Visual examination of the external walls of the building;
- Entering common areas of the building including lobby and hallways to assess egress;
- Visual inspection of essential safety measures (ESMs) in common areas;
- Access to two apartments/units, with the resident's permission;
- A product identification test undertaken by drilling a small hole into a non-descript part of the wall to expose the core of the material. In some instances, the inspector may need to take a sample of the cladding material.

Our inspectors will be able to provide more detail on-site as to the specific components of the inspection. They will endeavor to complete their inspections as fast as possible for your convenience.

(ESM inspection only) How does this ESM inspection relate to the cladding on my building?

As you would already be aware, your building has been inspected for combustible cladding and found to be within the higher risk category by an expert panel. We are conducting ESM inspections to increase the fire safety level of your building in relation to your essential safety measures while the process of combustible cladding rectification is undertaken on your building.

While both the ESM and combustible cladding inspections relate to improving the overall fire safety level of your building, they are primarily focused on different aspects of that process.

Is there anything I can do to make units/apartments safer in the meantime?

The VBA has a range of online resources and fire safety tips available to residents living in units and apartments on our website www.vba.vic.gov.au/cladding.

What is the next step after this inspection? When can I expect to hear from the VBA?

After our inspector has completed your on-site inspection, we will review their findings along with the documentation provided by you and the local council.

You should expect to hear from us within the next 6-8 weeks with the findings of this review and any recommended actions that we believe are required to increase the fire safety of your building. If you have any questions about this process or have not heard back from us after 8 weeks, please contact the Statewide Cladding Audit via the email address provided to your OC Manager.