

VBA grant program backs innovative fire safety research

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) is supporting researchers at RMIT University to better understand the fire safety risks associated with the installation of solar panels on the facades of multi-storey buildings.

The ground-breaking study is funded through the state building regulator's inaugural research grant program.

Solar building envelopes, also known as Building Integrated Photovoltaics (BIPV), offer important contributions to achieving net-zero energy buildings.

BIPV panels attach to building vertical structures and can harvest solar energy without the need for extensive roof space.

RMIT's Associate Professor Rebecca Yang is leading the research and said solar envelope technology had the potential to meet the future energy needs of buildings.

"Limited studies exist for the building industry to fully understand the fire risks of BIPV," Associate Professor Yang said.

The research aims to provide new information to help understand the performance of BIPV in fire conditions, and identify the fire performance requirements and testing required to demonstrate acceptable levels of safety for its use in building facades. This will lead to proposed test standards and guidelines for demonstrating compliance with the National Construction Code and improving national standards.

The VBA's Chief Operations Officer Jocelyn Crawford said the study aligned strongly with the regulator's research priorities.

"Fire safety is of vital concern in the use of BIPV in buildings. It is essential that its use on building facades and roofs to replace conventional building materials does not adversely affect the safety of building occupants and fire fighters, or the structural performance of buildings."

"The research to be undertaken by Associate Professor Yang and her team at RMIT stood out among a variety of strong proposals with benefits for the community, industry and government."

This is the second successful research grant application funded by the VBA, with grant funding recently announced for a project led by Dr Nicole Johnston and Deakin University.

The new program aims to boost the VBA's research capabilities by backing universities and TAFEs to find new and innovative solutions to challenges in the Victorian building and plumbing sector.

The VBA's research program helps the authority better understand emerging regulatory issues and consumer needs, and how regulations can be shaped to improve public safety.

Successful grant proposals aligned strongly with the VBA's research priorities to support the regulation of the building and plumbing industries in Victoria.

Further successful grant recipients will be announced in the coming weeks.