Costly lesson in building fire safety

A group of property owners is facing a bill of almost $500,000 to fix problems with their Noble Park apartment building, after the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) issued a building order in response to fire safety concerns.

The order was issued after an inspection revealed that the building did not have adequate fire safety measures, such as portable fire extinguishers, suitable fire exit doors, a compliant fire hydrant system and sufficient smoke detection and alarm systems.

The three-storey residential building was constructed by a developer, with the 55 apartments sold to individual owners. The apartments are mostly occupied by international students from a nearby university.

The VBA’s Director Compliance and Performance, Murray Smith, said nearly all buildings in Victoria, including houses, must meet fire safety requirements under the Building Regulations 2006.

“The problems identified with the building meant that there was a risk to life and safety for the occupants,” Mr Smith said.

“To comply with the building order, the owners must arrange for work to be carried out and appropriate fire safety equipment and systems installed.”

Building permits for the initial stages of the rectification work have been issued, with temporary safety measures in place while the work is completed.

“When the plans for the building were developed, there was little consideration for fire safety. As a result, the owners are now fixing the problem, at a cost of almost $500,000,” Mr Smith said.

“The owners have been very cooperative throughout the process. But it would have saved a lot of money and time for everyone involved if the developers had made sure the required safety measures were installed when the building was constructed.”

“This acts as a reminder about the importance of doing your homework when purchasing a property. If you are thinking of buying a house or a building, you should consider arranging a professional inspection to make sure it is safe and meets the building regulations before you buy.”

The building surveyor who issued the occupancy permit for the building is no longer registered.

VBA Chief Executive Officer Prue Digby said that as the industry regulator, protecting the safety of the public is a priority.

“We will take action when we consider a situation or building is dangerous.”

Ms Digby said anyone who is unsure about the fire safety features and measures required for their building should contact a building surveyor or visit the VBA website at www.vba.vic.gov.au for more information.

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