

Media Release

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VBA Releases External Wall Cladding Audit Report

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) [External Wall Cladding Audit](#) has found Melburnians can continue to have confidence in the safety of the buildings they live in and use but that non-compliance in the use of external wall cladding materials is unacceptably high.

The VBA launched the Audit, the first of its kind in Australia, following a fire at the Lacrosse Apartments in Melbourne's Docklands in November 2014. In April 2015, the MFB Post Incident Analysis of the fire found that the use of non-compliant aluminium composite panelling (ACP) had contributed to the spread of the fire.

Appropriate use of external wall cladding is detailed in the Building Code of Australia but the Lacrosse Apartment's use of its external cladding was not compliant raising the question of how many other buildings may have a similar cladding issue.

"The VBA External Wall Cladding Audit worked through thousands of documents relating to some 170 high rise residential and public buildings in the Melbourne CBD and immediately surrounding suburbs. We worked closely with the City of Melbourne (CoM) and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) to ensure that where non-compliance was detected, the risk to building occupants was quickly understood," said VBA CEO Prue Digby.

"The non-compliance rate found by the VBA Audit was 51 per cent. However, working with its regulatory partners, the CoM and the MFB, it was determined that the buildings' non-compliance did not pose a risk to the safety of occupants. Only one other building, the Harvest Apartments in Clarendon Street, South Melbourne, required immediate emergency action."

All buildings, including Lacrosse and Harvest, continue to be occupied.

The VBA will now consider further actions including the investigation of building practitioners involved in multiple instances of non-compliance identified through the VBA Audit and an extension of the Cladding Audit to areas beyond the criteria used in the original VBA Audit.

"The VBA continues to take action and work to give Victorians confidence in the buildings they occupy and use," said Ms Digby.

The VBA investigation into the conduct of the building practitioners involved in the Lacrosse Apartments is progressing.

Ends

Media enquiries

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FACT SHEET

Key findings from the VBA Audit and the VBA's proposed action to address the findings include:

Audit Finding

The rate of non-compliance was 51%.

VBA Action

Of the building permits audited, 51% of them were assessed by the VBA as non-compliant. Of these, 101 have been published to date on the VBA website. The remainder are with the relevant MBS to independently determine whether any other remedial action is required. These will be progressively published on the VBA's website as the relevant MBS completes their work. The VBA, CoM MBS and MFB working group have determined that none of these buildings posed a safety issue that required immediate action.

Audit Finding

In addition to the Lacrosse building, only one other building required an immediate emergency order to be issued by the MBS.

VBA Action

An emergency order was issued by the City of Port Phillip MBS in relation to the Harvest Apartments at 144-150 Clarendon Street, Southbank. Remedial action has already been undertaken to comply with the order.

Audit Finding

No single category of practitioner involved in the design, approval or construction of the buildings audited was consistently responsible for the use of cladding components of external walls that did not comply with the BCA.

VBA Action

Practitioners who were identified in the VBA Audit as being involved in multiple instances of non-compliance will be the subject of further investigation and audit activity.

Audit Finding

Practitioner understanding of the BCA:

- Decisions made by different practitioners at different stages – during design, material specification, design approval and construction – appear to have contributed to cladding being used as a component of external walls in ways that do not comply with the BCA;
- The VBA Audit identified that practitioners have differing degrees of understanding of the requirements of the BCA and the specification for components of an external wall.

VBA Action

The VBA is publishing a technical document for use by practitioners that clearly explains BCA requirements. The advice provides guidance particularly in relation to when cladding is required to be non-combustible and when and in what circumstances a combustible material can be used as an attachment (such as a sign or lining) to an external wall.

Future audits will include a focus on the application of the technical advice published by the VBA.

Audit Finding

Permit documentation issues:

- In the VBA Audit, the VBA requested documentation relating to the external wall cladding, but overall noted that the nature and scope of design detail contained in drawings and specifications forming part of a building permit appears in some instances to be inadequate. The detail was occasionally ambiguous for the purpose of determining compliance with the BCA and for issuing a compliant building permit;
- The documentation received by the VBA to illustrate materials and methods of construction used by the builder was sometimes inconsistent with the approved building permit or inadequate to demonstrate the “as built” building complied with the building permit.

VBA Action

The VBA will:

- Assess the documentation provided as part of the building permit process to ensure that sufficient detail is provided. This will be done as part of the VBA’s ongoing audit program.
- Issue further information and guidance in relation to documentation that reflects the findings of its audit.
- Work with industry bodies to inform relevant building practitioners of the requirements in relation to documentation.

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