VBA investigation of Lacrosse Apartments fire progressing

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) is continuing its investigation into the conduct of the building practitioners involved in the construction of the fire-damaged Lacrosse Apartments in Melbourne’s Docklands.

The VBA’s investigation follows the Post Incident Analysis that the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) released in late April 2015 into the Lacrosse fire which happened late last year. The MFB found the fire was caused by an unextinguished cigarette on an eighth floor balcony but spread because of the building construction’s use of a non-compliant aluminium cladding material in the building construction.

The State Coroner, His Honour Judge Gray, at the request of the MFB, will commence an Inquiry into whether regulations were a contributory factor to the fire. In his correspondence to the MFB, Judge Gray noted that “...the central issue appears to the combustibility of the cladding material used on the building and, in conjunction with that, whether the National and State regulatory frameworks ensured that risks were identified and addressed”.

“It will be extremely important to keep a tight and appropriate focus for the investigation and not to duplicate or replicate the work of other investigations into this particular fire,” Judge Gray said.

This means that the VBA’s role in investigating the conduct of the Lacrosse building practitioners is not being replaced by the Coroner’s investigation.

“The VBA conducts its investigations in accordance with its Compliance and Enforcement Policy which is based on the Australian Government Investigations Standards to ensure that all evidence gathered is admissible for the purposes of possible prosecution or disciplinary action,” VBA Director Compliance and Performance, Kate Despot, said.

The City of Melbourne, in consultation with the MFB and supported by the VBA, determined that the Lacrosse building was safe to occupy. Residents were allowed to return and were also told at a public meeting held by the City of Melbourne, with MFB and VBA in attendance, on 27 April 2015 that the building was safe to occupy.

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