



Fire Safety and External Wall Cladding

External Wall Cladding

Cladding is a term which describes the material used to cover the external wall of a building. Common materials used for cladding include weatherboard, lightweight panels (such as aluminium composite panels (ACPs), polystyrene products and metal sheeting. External cladding material can be part of the wall or used as an attachment. Cladding materials, including aluminium composite panels, can meet the ACT's safety standards if they are installed in accordance with the National Construction Code (NCC).

Fire Safety Regulations

Under the ACT Building Act, all new buildings and new building work must comply with the fire safety requirements of the NCC.

The NCC fire safety standards are based on risk to occupants – the higher the risk the more stringent the fire safety requirements to allow occupants to safely evacuate the building and reduce the chance of a spread of fire. This could include minimum fire resistance levels for certain building components, creating 'fire compartments' in a building, fire exits and fire safety systems such as, smoke detection and alarm systems, and emergency evacuation lighting.

Addressing Cladding and Fire Safety Risks

The ACT was one of the first Australian jurisdictions to raise concerns about the potentially non-compliant use of ACPs. From 2009 ACT Government officials, including ACT Fire & Rescue officers attended meetings with ACP suppliers, and fire engineers to raise awareness of when different types of cladding can be used.

ACT Fire & Rescue reviews all plans for new ACT buildings (excluding houses) with floor areas greater than 500 m² and where an alternative (performance-based) solution has been proposed and this check helps ensure that where ACPs are used, they are compliant with the NCC.

In 2009-10 ACT Officials raised the issue with other jurisdictions nationally through the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB). The ACT has been active at the national level working with other States and Territories and the ABCB to strengthen regulation to minimise the risk of using building products that do not conform and comply with the NCC.

The ABCB published a national advisory note relating to the appropriate use and selection of external wall cladding. This is part of a range of measures agreed to by the Building Ministers' Forum to address concerns relating to fire safety in high-rise buildings.

Cladding Review

The ACT Government is carrying out a review to determine whether combustible cladding materials have been used in Territory buildings in a way that doesn't comply with ACT building standards. If you have any information that would help to identify the non-compliant use of ACPs or other combustible cladding materials on a building in the ACT please contact the Building Cladding Working Group on (02) 6207 8370 or at claddingreview@act.gov.au.

Other measures

The ACT Government has also undertaken significant reforms over the past five years to improve the quality and compliance of new ACT buildings, including residential buildings. Initiatives include establishing a new auditing and inspection system and new education and training courses on the ACT building and certification systems, and increased penalties for noncompliance

For more information on ACT building standards visit www.planning.act.gov.au for information on the compliant use of appliances and products can be found at http://www.planning.act.gov.au/topics/design_build/correct-use-of-building-products-and-appliances. A website has also been established at the national level providing information on non-conforming building products, with facility for people to also make enquiries about building products. The website is <http://www.abcb.gov.au/NCBP/Non-Conforming-Building-Products>.