

8 February 2021

**The Hon. Brad Hazzard MP
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001**

Dear Minister,

The Property Owners Association of New South Wales is the peak body representing property owners in New South Wales.

ISSUE

There is a risk of infection of COVID-19 being introduced into high rise CBD strata apartment buildings by casualised security staff are working in both Covid-19 hotels and high-rise mixed-use strata buildings in the CBD.

DISCUSSION

There have now been multiple cases of returning travellers staying in hotel quarantine transmitting Covid-19 to contract cleaners and security staff in Covid-19 hotels. Some of these cases involve the new highly transmissible UK and South African strains.

The security and cleaning industries use mainly casual labour and many staff require second jobs to enable them to earn a living wage.

It is understood current government policy is to allow such staff to be employed in second jobs and to work over multiple locations in direct contact with the public.

The use of casual staff who may only be working a few shifts a week in a Covid-19 hotel increases the potential number of personnel who, if infected, could spread Covid-19 to the wider community.

Although Covid-19 staff are being tested regularly there have been instances where subsequently they have become positive and infectious after being in contact with the wider community.

It is now evident across Australia that although staff are tested regularly, there have been instances where staff have become positive and infectious after being in contact with the wider community.

There are instances of security staff who work in Covid-19 hotels and in high rise CBD strata building(s) which contain hundreds of residents and many commercial businesses (lawyers, property valuers, accountants, cafes, etc.) which attract hundreds of clients each day.

The duties of security staff working in such CBD strata buildings involves shifts of 8 to 12 hours and includes working as concierge, interacting with residents and visitors and inspecting all areas of the building.

This exposes owners, occupants, visitors and contractors working in such strata buildings to the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

There have now been multiple cases of capital cities having to lock down due to this method of transmission. This causes those communities great economic and mental stress and a foreseeable risk of potentially serious health outcomes.

In large strata buildings Owners Corporations employ security, cleaners and other staff. High-rise apartment buildings house hundreds of people, living in close proximity, using shared lobbies, corridors, lifts, gymnasiums, garbage rooms, commercial areas and so forth. In this environment, the use of staff who also work in quarantine hotels presents a higher risk than the risk of casual exposure in a supermarket or shopping mall.

Privacy issues prevent strata building management advising occupants who have compromised health issues or are otherwise at risk of potential exposure to enable occupants to take precautions to minimise their exposure risk.

There is no protocol for notifying an Owners Corporation that their strata building is the site of COVID 19 exposure. It is unclear if residents, occupants, contractors and staff are classified as casual or close contacts in such a cases.

It will be many months before the Australian population is vaccinated and new more virulent strains will enter Australia until all overseas arrivals have been vaccinated. The national hotel quarantine program will remain the most important measure that protects the Australian community for the foreseeable future.

The strata environment is unique – it is a workplace of close proximity communal living. In this context, the current NSW policy needs to be reviewed and modified to minimise the risk of further outbreaks and lock downs. In particular, the attributes of the residential and mixed-use high rise apartment buildings must be considered.

POA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A stable quarantine workforce be established from casual staff currently working in Covid-19 hotels and that they be employed fulltime (to ensure they earn a living wage) in only Covid -19 hotels thereby reducing the number of staff who, if infected, could transmit Covid-19 to the wider community.
2. Cleaning and security staff should be bound to either work in Covid-19 hotels OR in the wider community, not both.
3. Covid-19 health warnings should be issued to building occupants in the event any confirmed case of contractors, occupants or visitors to the building resulting in a confirmed case of Covid-19.

In this context current government policy needs to be reviewed and modified to minimise the risk of further outbreaks and lock downs.

Yours faithfully,