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Why lockdown really stinks for Sydney apartment owners

Michael Bleby *Senior reporter*



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Increasing lockdowns across Sydney have created a problem for apartment residents and the cleaning companies servicing them – there are not enough workers to meet their buildings' daily waste and sanitation needs.

Havencab has 400 workers in apartment buildings in central Sydney including the 68-level [Greenland Centre on Bathurst Street](#). But, not designated as authorised workers, 120 were grounded in lockdowns of the south-western suburbs and a further 80 with last week's extension of stay-at-home orders to Strathfield, Burwood and Bayside council areas.



Not enough staff: Havencab operations manager Diego Canavero at the Greenland Centre in central Sydney. **Dominic Lorrimer**

One more LGA lockdown, such as Inner West, would force another 35 of the company's workers to stay home and require Havencab to cut the already reduced cleaning and waste-management services it is providing to its 300 or so building clients, operations manager Diego Canavero said.

"We would want to try and reshuffle the current staff we have at that time," Mr Canavero told *The Australian Financial Review* on Monday.

"We'd say let's distribute the workforce so they do some servicing at these sites. But even we will get to the point where we say we can't."

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Cleaning companies and strata body advocates say the government's definitions of authorised workers – people able to travel outside their local council area to work – fail to recognise the needs of a housing type that is more complicated than standalone homes.

This is not a whinge about cleaners not dusting chandeliers, says Chris Duggan, the president of industry body Strata Community Association NSW. Rather, it is a dilemma created by the tension between adhering to public health requirements and ensuring buildings are maintained to appropriate standards.



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Large apartment buildings need regular cleaning of common areas such as foyers, lifts and corridors, and they generate large volumes of waste. Deborah Aitken lives in a 43-storey apartment building in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

“We have 43 separate garbage rooms. If they're not cleaned out daily, there's instantly a rat infestation and cockroaches,” Ms Aitken said.

“The rubbish then goes into large bins, dumpsters on wheels. Somebody has to take those bins into the loading bay, assist with the loading of them. Then they have to be cleaned. If they're not cleaned on a regular basis, you get rats and cockroaches in the garbage room, in the loading bay.”

Regulations designed with single-dwelling homes in mind do not work for apartment living in central Sydney, with an estimated 168,000 people living in apartments. said Karen Stiles. the executive officer of Owners Corporation

Network, an advocacy group.

Karen Stiles. **Louie Douvis**

“The government is strata blind,” Ms Stiles said.

“OCN has been petitioning the government since March 2020 to recognise the unique needs and transmission threat posed by high-density living.”

A NSW government spokeswoman said cleaning of common property of apartment buildings was not covered by the “waste recovery services” exemption in the current regulations.

But even if they were, many buildings did not have people available to oversee the work is done correctly and safely, Ms Aitken said.

“It’s too hard for people living in strata to manage this if they don’t have a facilities manager to supervise people coming in, to make sure all they are doing is the essential work of removing waste and keeping away from everyone else and not mixing,” Ms Aitken said.

“It’s easy in some buildings and hard in others.”

But with pest – not to mention infection risks – growing, it was crucial to respond to them, Mr Canavero said.

“If we don’t attend a site for a week and rotate the bins, the health hazard to the building would be ginormous,” he said.

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
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
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