

RISK TIP: CHINA DRYWALL SYNDROME

Or

THE NOT-SO-GREAT DRYWALL OF CHINA

The Scenario

Who is ready for one more thing to worry about? How about a new toxic material to check for in the homes we help people sell and buy? Let's get one that really stinks this time too. No more of that odorless, colorless and invisible stuff. Well, it may be coming to a southern Arizona location that you serve soon. It is called "Chinese Drywall".

Due in part to the construction boom resulting from the widespread rebuilding that took place after hurricane Katrina, and the unrelated housing boom in general, there was a shortage of drywall available from U.S. suppliers. According to many authoritative sources, approximately 20 million square feet of drywall was imported from China between 2002 and 2008 and was used in and is exposing 50,000 to 100,000 homes to the toxic elements it contained. Problems have been reported in newly constructed homes in more than a dozen states so far – mainly in the south and east, but also to include California. Florida is probably the worst hit so far.

The problems are not limited to new construction however. Any home that was remodeled involving replacement of walls with the offensive drywall during this time period will probably suffer the same problems.

Due to naturally occurring materials found in the tainted drywall, it emits a foul odor like rotten eggs. This seems to be exacerbated by humid conditions and being closed in – as in home construction.

The Risk

Exposure to the toxic gases may cause a variety of health problems depending on individual sensitivities. Symptoms are said to include headaches, respiratory ailments, irritated eyes, and nosebleeds. In addition, the toxic gas is thought to be responsible for corroding copper and tarnishing silver, resulting in the failure of everything from computers and TVs to air conditioners and refrigerators.

There is currently a lot of rumor and buzz about Chinese drywall in Arizona. **However, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT, as of this writing, no specific credible evidence could be found of Chinese drywall being present in southern Arizona.** Caution and awareness are always good though.

What To Do

Use caution and be aware and informed. First, make sure that your clients are advised about the potential for this hazard just like all other possible structural / environmental hazards in a home, e.g., lead, asbestos, radon, etc. Next, ensure that the home inspector that is employed is familiar with the issues and the potential for concern with Chinese drywall. Ask them to make specific written remarks regarding this issue in their inspection report.

Lab testing for sulfur and toxic materials is available for suspected product.

As with some other toxic materials found in homes (lead, asbestos, radon, etc.) there can be legitimate and effective methods of mitigation and hazard reduction and / or removal if Chinese drywall is found.

Please take the time to further educate yourself on this topic by visiting the following linked websites:

<http://www.epa.gov/oswer/docs/chinesedrywall.pdf>

<http://www.chinesedrywall.com/>

<http://chinesedrywallblog.com/>

<http://blogs.consumerreports.org/safety/2009/03/chinese-drywall-corrosion-health-problems-sulfur-odor.html>

<http://www.cpsc.gov/info/drywall/index.html>

<http://pubs.acs.org/cen/science/87/8718sci2.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/search.do?queryText=chinese+drywall&action=search>

July 20, 2009