

CHINESE DRYWALL

WHAT IS CHINESE DRYWALL?

Chinese drywall is defective or tainted drywall (also referred to as wallboard or plasterboard) imported from China. Not all drywall manufactured from China is tainted. Some defective drywall is not stamped at all and there are a few reported cases where defective drywall bears the name of a U.S. company. It is unknown whether the drywall was actually manufactured in the U.S. or made in China and re-branded here.

WHAT MAKES CHINESE DRYWALL DEFECTIVE?

There are several theories regarding the cause of the defective drywall, including: (1) the tainted drywall was manufactured at a gypsum mine in Tianjin, China which used fly ash, a waste material that is a byproduct from power plants using coal. Fly ash can leak into the air and emit sulfur compounds. Testing by the Florida Department of Health, however, has revealed significant amounts of organic material present in the Chinese drywall - ranging from 5 to up to 15 percent. Dr. David Krause, the State Toxicologist, states that these findings appear to contradict the theory that waste product from coal-fired power plants are to blame, as they would not be organic. (2) Thomas Eager, an MIT professor believes the combination of cellulose, moisture and sulfates in the gypsum are reacting to release sulfurous acids that are corroding copper and other metals. However, drywall is usually made of gypsum (hydrated calcium sulfate) and, therefore, sulfur is one of the main components in odorous and non-odorous drywall; (3) Chinese drywall was kept on barges at sea for months awaiting permission to enter the United States. While at sea, the drywall was exposed to seawater, which somehow is responsible for the odor; (4) the drywall contains iron disulfide and sulfur odors are created when certain anaerobic bacteria utilize iron and other molecules for growth; and (5) fumigants were sprayed on the drywall.

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NEW HEALTH CONCERNS

For months, homeowners have been reporting physical ailments and symptoms including coughing, irritated eyes, sneezing, sinus problems, sore throat, asthma, difficulty breathing, runny nose, bloody nose, fatigue, headaches, dizziness and nausea after being exposed to Chinese drywall.

Recently, there is anecdotal evidence of more serious symptoms, including urinary tract and bladder infections in women exposed to Chinese drywall. Please seek medical attention and contact your local health department to report these symptoms.

WHY IS CHINESE DRYWALL DESTROYING HOMES?

It is believed that humidity causes the sulfur in the tainted drywall to offgas (i.e., migrate into the indoor air), which not only creates a noxious odor, but corrodes copper and other metals. **DO NOT WASH YOUR WALLS OR STEAM CLEAN YOUR FLOORS OR CARPET IF YOU SUSPECT THAT YOU HAVE CHINESE DRYWALL.**

WHAT IS THE TIME-FRAME?

Hundreds of millions of sheets of Chinese drywall were imported from 2004 to 2006, but Chinese drywall has recently been found in homes built or remodeled as early as 2001. Accordingly, this phenomenon cannot be explained solely by the shortage of American-manufactured drywall.

WHERE WAS THE DRYWALL IMPORTED AND WHICH BUILDERS USED CHINESE DRYWALL?

Although not confirmed, the presence of Chinese drywall has been reported in 41 states and is estimated to have been installed in over 100,000 homes in the United States. Homes in Canada may also have also been affected. One must wonder - has any tainted drywall been found in China or Germany (which is where Knauf is based).

Given the volume of Chinese drywall, any home built or remodeled (irrespective of the builder) from 2001 to the present could have Chinese drywall.

Wiring: Chinese drywall corrodes electrical wiring. Check the electrical receptacles in your walls to see if the wires are blackened. Pull off the electrical plate and look inside. Obviously, do not touch anything - you could get shocked. There should be a copper wire inside.

Chinese drywall may also corrode your copper water lines so check behind your refrigerator and under your sink. Metals such as chrome, brass and silver may also be affected. Bathroom and kitchen faucets and drains are typically tarnished in homes with Chinese drywall.

Corroded metals such as brass fittings, copper coils, and electrical wires may pose an immediate health risk because it could cause gas pipes to leak. You could be exposed to Freon or natural gas if parts of your air conditioning unit are corroded. Corroded electrical wires may cause smoke and carbon monoxide detectors not to function correctly.

Smell: Does your home smell like rotten eggs or ammonia (sometimes a sweetish smell)? Is it more noticeable when entering your home and then seems to dissipate? The level of odor varies greatly in each home as does each person's ability to detect the odor. Of course, the strength of

the odor also depends on how much drywall was used in the home. Significantly, some homeowners report no smell, but their home clearly has Chinese drywall. In short, do not rely on your nose alone.

WHAT IF I HAVE CHINESE DRYWALL? WHO SHOULD I CONTACT?

First, notify your builder, particularly if your home is still under warranty. Depending on your builder's response, you may want to hire an independent inspector. You may also need to notify your home insurer and possibly your lender, but before you do so, please consult an attorney.

If Chinese drywall is found, it must be removed, but there is a tremendous amount of controversy in terms of what other components need to be replaced. Experts warn that it may not be enough to simply rip out the drywall without addressing the piping, wiring and other systems that have been exposed. Note, there are a few alarmists who are suggesting that your home must be bulldozed. To date, there is no evidence to support such a drastic measure.

Before you allow your builder to remediate, however, you should consult an attorney to make sure the proper remediation protocol is being implemented and that you will be protected in the event remediation is unsuccessful or should you have any long-term health issues. **DO NOT SIGN A RELEASE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS.** In severe cases, nails and framing components may also have been affected, which means structural integrity could be a concern.

You may also want to ask for a performance bond. If the builder files for bankruptcy or fails to pay the contractors/subcontractors, you could be liable to those who worked on your home.

IS CHINESE DRYWALL TOXIC?

According to Dr. Patricia Williams, a University of New Orleans toxicologist, highly toxic compounds have been found in drywall, including hydrogen sulfide, sulfuric acid, sulfur dioxide and carbon disulfide. Prolonged exposure to these compounds can cause serious problems and affect the nervous system.

Unified Engineering, Inc., a private laboratory hired by the Florida Department of Health, found that Chinese drywall samples emitted "volatile sulfur compounds" and that trace amounts of strontium sulfide were present in drywall samples. Strontium sulfide can react in moist air to form hydrogen sulfide. According to Dr. David Krause, state toxicologist, the Department has not identified any "data suggesting an imminent or chronic health hazard at this time." "That isn't saying we've declared it safe. We are continuing the evaluation and moving forward on a much more in-depth and broad scope of the investigation." See Florida Department of Health Results at <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/community/indoor-air/drywall.html>. Notably, there is evidence that the samples may have cross-contaminated, which is part of the reason for further testing.

According to Dr. Phillip Goad, a toxicologist hired by Knauf, simply denies that there is any

health risk. "The studies we have performed to date have identified very low levels of naturally occurring compounds. The levels we have detected do not present a public health concern." These results may be meaningless because the air sampled was alleged taken from unoccupied, partially completed homes. One of the homes had no front door, which could have allowed extra air exchange from the outside.

Notwithstanding, CTEH did find sulfur compounds in homes, but stated: "Based on comparison with occupational and public exposure limits, toxicology testing data, and on data regarding air concentrations from natural sources, it was concluded that measured concentrations of the detected chemicals." Using limits set for businesses where employees spend only 40 hours per week is quite different than breathing these compounds in close quarters every day, sometimes 24 hours a day, for weeks, months and years on end. To date, no limits have been established for residential exposure.

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