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...HOMEOWNERS WHOSE RENOVATIONS NOW IMPORTS TO NORTH AMERICA FROM CHINA ARE MAKING PEOPLE SICK. — CNS FILES

Toxic wallboard turning up in Canada

MADE IN CHINA: Metro Vancouver homeowners turn to U.S. advocates for help

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STAFF REPORTER

Homeowners from Surrey, Richmond, Burnaby and West Vancouver have joined a flood of callers to a U.S. consumer group investigating highly toxic Chinese drywall that has sickened North Americans.

Thomas Martin, president of America's Watchdog, said yesterday that in the past two weeks about a dozen Metro Vancouver callers have all reported experiencing the same nosebleeds, breathing problems and allergy-type symptoms that have affected homeowners across the U.S.

Continued exposure could result in severe health problems, says Martin's group.

"It's scary, it's a nightmare," said Martin. "We think we are looking at

the worst case of sick houses in U.S. history. Toxic Chinese drywall is the worst environmental disaster ever to be faced by U.S. homeowners."

A copy of one home-inspection report obtained by *The Province* on a Florida home where Chinese drywall was installed reads:

"This type of drywall was produced with materials that emit toxic hydrogen-sulfide gas and other sulfide gases alleged to cause serious health conditions and illnesses, such as shortness of breath, dizziness, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, eye irritations and respiratory difficulties.

Martin said he likens the effects of the drywall "to the problems you find in a meth house [where an illegal drug lab has been operating].

"If you've had any experience with

a meth house, you know it will have to be bulldozed. Like in a meth house, the emissions permeate everything, the two-by-fours, the trusses, the fabric in your furniture, your clothes."

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said last week it was investigating complaints about the Chinese-made drywall.

Martin, whose California office phones rang constantly during a *Province* interview, said the group has also fielded calls from worried Canadians who bought property south of the border — such as in Blaine and the Skagit Valley in Washington state — some time ago when the Canadian dollar was higher.

At issue is drywall imported from China between 2001 and 2007.

According to Martin's research, at

least 929,000 square metres were imported through the port of Vancouver between 2001 and 2006, all bound for Canadian destinations.

So far, research shows some appears to have landed on the Prairies and some in Toronto.

The Chinese drywall appears to have been made using gypsum that was first used in slurry containing carcinogens to de-sulphur coal. It was later used in making wallboard.

Chemicals remaining in the wallboard are sufficiently toxic that as few as three sheets of drywall may be enough to contaminate a home sufficiently that it requires bulldozing, Martin said.

All houses affected have shown a common symptom — blackened, scorched wiring behind switchplates and wall plugs.

Martin said supplies in the U.S. can be tracked where they were used by licensed builders, and insurance may pay for the damages. But anyone using small firms or paying for renovations under the table will be difficult to help.

Few Canadian labour or industry officials contacted by *The Province* yesterday were aware of the issue.

Tiziana Baccaga, public relations manager for Home Depot in Canada, said the chain has never sold Chinese-made drywall in any of its Canadian or U.S. outlets.

Several lawsuits, including one by a group of Florida homeowners, have been filed against German drywall maker Knauf Gips KG, its Chinese plasterboard units and several U.S. homebuilders.

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How do you know if your home contains a threat to your health?

What are the signs of toxic wallboard?

Human symptoms: Severe allergies, nosebleeds, headaches, upper respiratory

problems. These may ease if homeowners leave the house for an extended period then return once they're back home.

Home/condo symptoms:

Faint to strong smell of rotten eggs, especially when all windows and doors are closed and water is not running.

ning.

Corrosion of heating or air conditioning coils. Tarnish on silver jewelry or furniture.

Blackened, scorched wiring behind switchplates and plug plates.

What to do: Call researchers at America's

Watchdog's Chinese Drywall Complaint Center: 1-866-214-6466 or visit <http://homeownersconsumercenter.com/>

— Christina Montgomery

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