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National News

Grand Jury Reports on Charges Against Farmers Insurance

February 3, 2000

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SAN MARCOS, Texas, Feb. 3- A Hays County Grand Jury has found reason to continue a criminal investigation of Endangerment to a Child charges involving Farmers Insurance Company, as reported today by PR Newswire.

After a four-month investigation, prompted by a criminal complaint filed with the Hays County Sheriff's Department by Melinda Ballard of Dripping Springs, in May of 1999, members of the twelve-person Grand Jury reported the case merited possible further action, according to the PR Newswire report.

The Grand Jury requested the investigation remain open, pending additional evidence that may arise proving Farmers knowingly or intentionally exposed a three-year-old boy to a deadly neurotoxic mold.

PR Newswire reported that the language in the statute governing the charge of Endangerment to a Child, reads as follows:

"A person commits the offense of Endangerment to a Child if he, by act or omission, engages in conduct that places a child, younger than 15 years, in imminent danger of death, bodily injury, or physical or mental impairment." (Texas Penal Code section 22.041)

According to PR Newswire, Ballard's complaint alleges that Farmers' microbiologist, Dan Bridge of Rimkus Engineering in Houston, found the family to be living in space containing airborne Stachybotrys ("Stachy") spores, yet neither Bridge nor Farmers informed the family of their discovery until the mold had caused irreversible health effects. The family retained the services of Texas Tech University to conduct testing of the home and evacuated their residence immediately, once Texas Tech's testing confirmed the presence of toxic spores in their living areas.

Stachy is a toxic mold that grows on wet building materials, according to PR Newswire's report. It has been linked to deaths in infants and causes severe cognitive and respiratory disorders. Experts say that it is unusual that Stachy spores become airborne, but when such a situation occurs, it's a sign that Stachy is throughout a structure and residents should evacuate the premises.

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The family filed a civil suit against Farmers earlier this year as reported by PR Newswire.

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