

# The New Zealand Herald

## Family's nine-year ordeal in toxic home

By Andrew Laxon



Joseph and Margaret Chee at home. Photo / Natalie Slade

Joseph Chee came to New Zealand from Malaysia with his wife and children looking forward to a new start.

Nine years later, the family are still living with the nightmare of a leaky home infected by toxic mould.

The leaks began with water seeping from an upstairs balcony into the living room below and spread to other parts of the two-storey monolithic-clad house in Bucklands Beach.

Mr Chee said the garage, living room and master bedroom areas now contained stachybotrys, a dangerous mould found in damp areas and linked to respiratory illnesses and infant deaths.

The 56-year-old watch salesman told the *Herald* that his family had been through extreme stress, anxiety and countless sleepless nights. He was on medication for high blood pressure.

"It is no wonder some victims have committed or attempted suicide."

Mr Chee felt victimised and terribly let down by the Government-run Weathertight Homes Tribunal, which awarded only \$141,800 for limited "target repairs", when he had claimed \$443,115 for a full reclad.

The High Court has ordered the tribunal to rehear the case because of a series of legal errors and failure to observe natural justice but Mr Chee said he had lost all confidence in the tribunal and the adjudicator, Christopher Ruthe.

Mr Chee had spent about \$30,000 on expert advice and the High Court hearing. He did not know how he would deal with the cost of a repeat hearing.

"I'm at a loss. I'm still considering."

Tribunal chairwoman Trish McConnell accepted the judge's criticisms and will discuss them with adjudicators and staff next week.

She did not believe Mr Ruthe had made up his mind in favour of the council before the hearing but could understand why Mr Chee felt that way.

It was sometimes difficult for the tribunal, which acted in a more investigative way than a court, not to go too far.

"We have to be extraordinarily careful that we don't predetermine issues."

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