

## **Family Settles for \$22 Million Over Moldy House**

### **Moldy Wood Said to Have Caused Brain Damage in Child**

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The number of lawsuits involving mold have exploded in the past few years. But the settlement in a recent California case is the first of its kind.

Five-year-old Kellen Gorman cannot talk, is still in diapers and requires constant supervision. His family contended that the mold in his home caused brain damage.

"He's always going to be way behind," said the boy's father, Gary Gorman. "Whether he stays a 1-year-old, gets to a 2-year-old, gets to a 5-year-old ~ nobody can say exactly how far he's going to get."

Experts told them that some of the lumber used to construct their house was moldy. That mold grew and seeped through the walls and the floors and exposed the family to an organic toxic mold they believe was responsible for damaging Kellen's brain.

The alleged link between mold and brain damage is controversial, but it is well-known that mold can cause a variety of health problems including respiratory ailments.

"It looked like humidity had settled on the walls," said Kellen's mother, Dana Gorman.

The Germans recently settled for \$22.6 million after suing 17 companies involved with the construction of their house. The highest portion — \$13 million ~ was paid by the Crenshaw Lumber Co. Inc., which supplied the moldy wood used to build the home.

Crenshaw said it settled after the judge would not permit some of its experts to testify. None of the 17 companies sued have admitted any wrongdoing. Crenshaw issued a statement saying it believed that if its witnesses been allowed to testify, the company would have been vindicated.

"This is a case that puts attention on the fact that mold exposure can lead not just to the old culprits of respiratory pulmonary problems but can lead to brain injuries through an immunologic process," attorney Brian Witzer said.

Most of the money will go to Kellen's lifetime care.

The following tips for preventing and cleaning mold at home come from the Environmental Protection Agency.

To Prevent Mold:

- Moisture control is the key to mold control, so when water leaks or spills occur indoors 11 act quickly. If wet or damp materials or areas are dried 24 hours to 48 hours after a leak or spill happens, in most cases mold will not grow.
- Clean and repair roof gutters regularly.

- Make sure the ground slopes away from the building foundation, so that water does not enter or collect around the foundation.
- Keep air conditioning drip pans clean and the drain lines unobstructed and flowing properly.
- Keep indoor humidity low. If possible, keep indoor humidity below 60 percent (ideally between 30 percent and 50 percent) relative humidity. Relative humidity can be measured with a moisture or humidity meter, a small, inexpensive (\$10 to \$50) instrument available at many hardware stores.
- Vent appliances that produce moisture, such as clothes dryers, stoves and kerosene heaters to the outside where possible. (Combustion appliances such as stoves and kerosene heaters produce water vapor and will increase the humidity unless vented to the outside.)
- Use air conditioners and/or dehumidifiers when needed.
- Run the bathroom fan or open the window when showering. Use exhaust fans or open windows whenever cooking, running the dishwasher or dishwashing, etc.
- If you see condensation or moisture collecting on windows, walls or pipes act quickly to dry the wet surface and reduce the moisture/water source. Condensation can be a sign of high humidity.

#### To Clean Up Mold:

- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with detergent and water, and dry completely. Fix plumbing leaks and other water problems as soon as possible. Dry all items completely.
- Absorbent or porous materials, such as ceiling tiles and carpet, may have to be thrown away if they become moldy. Mold can grow on or fill in the empty spaces and crevices of porous materials, so the mold may be difficult or impossible to remove completely.
- Avoid exposing yourself or others to mold.
- Do not paint or caulk moldy surfaces. Clean up the mold and dry the surfaces before painting. Paint applied over moldy surfaces is likely to peel.
- If you are unsure about how to clean an item, or if the item is expensive or of sentimental value, you may wish to consult a specialist. Specialists in furniture repair, restoration, painting, art restoration and conservation, carpet and rug cleaning, water damage, and fire or water restoration are commonly listed in phone books. Be sure to ask for and check references. Look for specialists who are affiliated with professional organizations.

Source: ABC News