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Trussville family battles with HUD over mold problem

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By Lisa Crane

A Trussville family is thankful to be back in their own home.

They spent six months fighting it out with the federal government over mold that had taken over their home. That mold came from an adjoining townhome that is owned by Housing and Urban Development.

The Johannsen home is back to normal. The Trussville family bought their modest three-bedroom duplex years ago, although it feels brand-new to them now.

The Johannsens discovered their home was infested with mold just more than a year ago. Their nightmare began on New Years Day 2009.

"It was definitely a roller coaster up and down for six months," Leslieanne Johannsen said.

The mold was coming from the adjoining townhome owned by the federal government's Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Leslianne says a roof leak in that empty unit that went unattended for weeks started it all. When she tried to get HUD and the management companies hired to take care of the unit to help, she got nowhere fast.

"Every day I just wanted to cry, i just wanted somebody to listen. I just wanted something resolved and going through lawyers back and forth wasn't getting anywhere. I had just had enough," Leslieanne said.

Mold in a home can be dangerous. Fact: mold can trigger allergic reactions, asthma attacks and some can even produce potent toxins and irritants.

As the parents of two toddlers, the Johannsens said they had no choice but to move out of their home while continuing to try to get HUD to take care of the problem. After six weeks of living at a friend's house, they called NBC13 for help.

"Having it on TV and having some people getting involved helped get us going in the right direction," Leslieanne said.

After we called HUD and the management companies and the Johannsens got rid of their attorney and started pushing for a settlement on their own, the family finally reached an agreement with HUD.

The department paid to fix the roof of the adjacent unit, clean out all the mold in both homes and repair the Johannsen home. Workers had to rip out carpet, drywall and insulation and pretty much rebuild the Johannsen home.

"We put new tile, new counter top, painted the vanity," Leslieanne said.

The Johannsens also got reimbursed for the six mortgage payments they made when they weren't able to live in their home for six months. They had hoped for compensation for their frustration and inconvenience, but that didn't happen.

"It wasn't what we were hoping for, it was enough to get us back in the house and I guess that was worth what we didn't get in order to get on with our lives," Leslieanne said.

Leslianne said the unit next door is still empty and she still worries that a problem there could go undetected and impact their home again.

"You never know what's going on on the other side of your walls, you can only control your own so that's what we're doing and hoping everything will stay safe," Leslieanne said.

The Johannsens say it took too long for HUD to accept responsibility for the mold problem and then repair it. But now that they've been in their newly renovated home for several months, the memory and the bad feelings are starting to fade.

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