

# U.S. to probe tainted drywall

**Pressed by members of Congress from Florida and Louisiana, the federal consumer safety chief promised a thorough investigation of defective Chinese drywall.**

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Miami Herald

September 11, 2009

Lawmakers from Florida and Louisiana on Thursday pressed new Consumer Product Safety Commission Chairwoman Inez Tenenbaum for answers to the Chinese drywall problem plaguing thousands of homeowners in their states.

Tenenbaum -- who took over the agency in June -- pledged that the agency will "vigorously pursue its investigation" into the cause and effect of the suspect drywall, which homeowners say is making them ill and corroding metal pipes.

She said the agency hopes to issue a report on indoor air quality and health assessments in homes with Chinese drywall in late October.

"I understand the personal hardship that this issue has caused homeowners and want to reassure members of the subcommittee that effective and efficient completion of this investigation is a key priority for the CPSC," she told members of the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection.

She said in prepared remarks that the agency was "pouring a record amount of money and manpower toward the goal of helping affected families."

An internal commission task force -- which made an investigative trip to China to meet with government and industry officials -- has conducted air sampling field work in 50 homes and hopes to release a report by late October with initial air sampling test results and a preliminary health assessment, Tenenbaum said.

Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., said he was eager to hear the agency's findings. He said that, after Florida, Louisiana has had the most number of complaints and that his office has fielded complaints from homeowners who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina, only to find themselves having to move out of homes with shoddy drywall.

"It's clear drywall has wreaked havoc in homes," he said.

Tenenbaum said one likely recommendation will be standards for drywall safety, noting that current drywall standards address only "structural integrity" -- not toxicity.

Rep. Bruce Braley, D-Iowa, called the drywall "just the tip of the iceberg of what's wrong with import monitoring in this country."

And Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Tampa, called the situation an "important Florida issue" and asked whether the agency was considering a ban on Chinese drywall imports.

"It's making many families in Florida sick," she said. "Families should not have to worry that building materials in their homes emit toxic fumes."

As of Thursday, about 600 complaints related to Chinese drywall had been reported to the Florida Department of Health.

Tenenbaum suggested that the adverse publicity was already serving as a practical ban on the product.

"The market has taken care of that," Tenenbaum said. "Very few people want Chinese drywall and we see very little of it coming into the country at this time."

As of Sept. 4, she said the commission had received 1,192 incident reports about drywall from 24 states and the District of Columbia. The majority of the reports are from Florida, Louisiana, and Virginia.

*Miami Herald business writer Nirvi Shah contributed.*