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Chinese drywall forces residents out of homes



Photos by **ERIC HASERT** • eric.hasert@scripps.com

Alyse Simons, left and her husband, Bradley, care for their 18-week-old son Beckham after Alyse returns home from her work as a receptionist at a doctor's office, and before Bradley heads off for his job at the CVS Distribution Center in Vero Beach. The couple, currently living in Alyse's parents house are about to move into a new home at the end of the month after leaving their foreclosed Mercedes home in Vero Lake Estates that was built using Chinese drywall. "It's been very challenging, and it's definitely made a strong foundation for our marriage. I would not wish this upon anyone because it's been really tough," Alyse Simons said.

Vero Lake Estates couple attribute health issues to their house

BY NADIA VANDERHOOF
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Within the first six months of buying their new Vero Lake Estates home in 2007, the air conditioning unit in Bradley and Alyse Simons' home mysteriously stopped working.

Shortly after that, the couple began to experience nosebleeds, stinging in their eyes and sensed a foul odor in their single-family home. They soon started coughing up blood and noticed certain fixtures in the home were showing signs of corrosion.

"We lived without air conditioning for six months because (repair companies) would try to repair it and replace the parts, but it never got fixed," Bradley Simons said. "They replaced five different parts and the coils, twice."

Like hundreds of other homeowners on the Treasure Coast, the Simons'



Dan Savini, 75, checks wiring in the breaker box for any additional corrosion from Chinese drywall in his 4-year-old second-story unit at The Promenade in Tradition. Savini spent \$17,000 of his own money to tear out the Chinese drywall and replace it himself after not being able to get help from the builders and developers of the development. Almost a third of the units in his neighborhood were constructed using the contaminated drywall.

life has been disrupted by the imported toxic wall-board. Chinese drywall has destroyed home values in some communities and

others say it has caused serious health issues for those who unknowingly spent their life's savings on a house built with Chinese

drywall.

According to a database provided to Scripps Howard News Service from the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, about 166 Chinese drywall complaints have originated from the Treasure Coast including 53 from Indian River County, 90 from St. Lucie County and 23 from Martin County.

Some of the database's more serious complaints consist of an elderly Vero Beach man attributing his double pneumonia and lung problems to Chinese drywall in his home and the parents of a 2½-year-old Vero Beach boy claim he developed asthma and had pneumonia twice because of the toxic imported wall-board. An Indian River County woman also claims to have been diagnosed with lung cancer after discovering Chinese drywall in her

SEE DRYWALL, PAGE A4

53 Number of complaints in Indian River
90 Number of complaints in St. Lucie
23 Number of complaints in Martin

"These homes are worth next to nothing now, and nobody has been given real guidance on remediation."

Manuel Comras, West Palm Beach attorney

CHINESE DRYWALL EXPLAINED

- An analysis of data from U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission by Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers found local health-related Chinese drywall complaints ranging from bouts of double pneumonia in toddlers and the elderly to reports of elevated liver enzymes and other serious lung conditions. One complainant even claims she was diagnosed with

cancer after living with Chinese drywall. Meanwhile, Scripps Howard News Service found that five deaths are being linked to tainted drywall in Louisiana and four in other regions of Florida.

- A comprehensive database of Treasure Coast complaints to the CPSC can be accessed at TCPalm.com/drywallhealth. There, readers can see the types of metal corruptions occurring in local homes attributed to the drywall and the serious

health issues reported by hundreds of Treasure Coast homeowners.

- The Sunday report tells the story of how different homeowners in Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River counties are dealing with Chinese drywall in their homes. On Monday, we tell readers which federal agencies are involved in the investigation, how they are handling complaints and get reaction from local politicians.



RUSS LEMMON
INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

'Ice Cream Man' was invited into gated community

Seven bite-size Lemmon Drops to nibble on while waiting for Crystal Bowersox to prevail on "American Idol":

"It's finally happened," reader Bud wrote. "I disagree with one of your columns. First time ever!"

In this space last week, you'll recall, I wrote about someone who lives in a gated community calling the Indian River County Sheriff's Office on "The Ice Cream Man." I said it was a case of adults contributing to the loss of innocence in today's society.

Bud says he pays "a considerable amount each year to live in a gated community," and the gate is there for a reason.

Well, as much as I hate doing so, I'm going take on a Strike 2 from Bud.

Turns out "The Ice Cream Man" in question is a woman. April Johnson sent me a very informative e-mail about her business, Sweet Stuff. In her nearly nine years in business, she can count on one hand the number of times someone has called a law-enforcement agency.

"I'd like to point out that we did not just happen into the neighborhood," she wrote. "We were invited. Someone gave us a code

to the gate. How did they think we got in? ... I wonder, what makes the rights of one complainer more important than the dozens of people who want us there? (Squeaky wheel?)"

She wasn't mad. She was just explaining the situation. She touched upon her business credentials, the volume of the music and her daily schedule. She even attached a photo of her truck.

This was at the heart of

her e-mail: "When we see a diaper-clad toddler waving a dollar bill at us, when we see kids jumping up and down, when we see adults doing a little jig to our music or saluting when "God Bless America" plays,

when a wagging-tailed dog comes for his treat, we say, "This is what it's all about. This is why I do this job."

What kids say you, Bud? The kids can meet the ice-cream truck outside the gate. Same time, same place every week.

- Preview of a historical snapshot: The final meeting of the Kiwanis Club of Vero Beach is scheduled for noon Thursday at T.G.I. Friday's. Founded in 1935, the service club's demise is a sign of the times.

SEE LEMMON, PAGE A4

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