

MOLD FORCES FAMILY OUT OF SATURNIA HOME



By Christine Selvaggi

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They suffered from chronic cough, ear infections, bronchitis and tonsillitis. The Greene family, Lisa and Kenneth along with sons Brandon and Michael, felt like they could never regain their health before another ailment appeared.

"We never really got sick before and now was never able to shake it," Lisa Greene said.

The sudden decline in health that began almost two years ago coincided with the family's move into a new, 5,602-square-foot home in the Saturnia subdivision west of Boca Raton. And as new furniture and closets full of clothes began to take on a stench, the Greenes knew something was wrong.

"People started saying our clothing stunk," Lisa Greene remembered. "Our house started to smell musty and I thought, 'New houses aren't supposed to do this.'"

Mold, which relies on moisture to survive, had invaded the Greenes' home and was the cause of the smell and the illnesses, the Greenes say. The potentially toxic spores were growing in the walls, after the homebuilder, GL Homes, and Central Air Control, the subcontractor, constructed a faulty air conditioning system, they contend.

The Greenes hired Joseph Lstiburek, a forensic engineer with Massachusetts-based Building Science Corp., to test their home. Lstiburek said the home had "too much" mold in it.

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LISA GREENE, HOMEOWNER

"If you smell it and you see it, you have too much of it," he said.

Because mold is naturally occurring, there are no regulations or recommended limits, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Lstiburek said he did not test the air of the Greenes' home for mold, but said it was visible and had a strong odor.

After less than 18 months in their \$540,000 home, Lisa and Kenneth Greene took Brandon and Michael from the house, leaving everything they owned behind.

The Greenes filed a lawsuit against GL Homes and Central Air this month, for faulty construction leading to mold infestation. They are the third family in Saturnia to do so.

In a written statement, GL Homes division president Marcie DePlaza said the company had not received the Greenes' lawsuit and could not comment on it. But DePlaza wrote that GL Homes responded to a customer service request in March and began an investigation. The builder since has been denied access to the home to complete the investigation, DePlaza wrote.

Central Air could not be reached for comment.

Lisa Greene said she thought GL Homes wasn't taking any responsibility for the mold. Though the builder did test the home for mold, Greene said the results were not made available to her family. That action prompted the Greenes to file suit for damages in excess of \$15,000.

"I feel like no one wants to take responsibility for this," Greene said.

There is no practical way to eliminate all mold or mold spores, according to the EPA, but eliminating the sources of moisture is recommended. The EPA suggests fixing leakages, and using exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens. For more information, visit www.epa.gov.