



CHINESE-MANUFACTURED DRYWALL

DRYWALL MANUFACTURED IN, AND IMPORTED FROM, CHINA

for use in construction projects in the United States recently has become a topic of active scrutiny in the media and among some public policymakers. Drywall is a widely used building material in U.S. homes and commercial structures. Because of this fact, the Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) – an applied science organization dedicated to improving structural resiliency and durability – has undertaken a survey of publicly available information related to Chinese-manufactured drywall with the goal of better understanding concerns about the Chinese drywall's performance relative to similar products, as well as any potential negative impact on other building systems.

According to the Gypsum Association, some 300 million square feet of drywall was imported into the U.S. from China during 2006 and 2007. It is important to note that during that same time period, nearly 66 billion square feet of drywall was used in the U.S.

While no diminution of product strength has been publicly asserted, it has been alleged that specific Chinese drywall imported into the U.S. between 2004 and 2006 emits sulfur vapors into indoor air. Because sulfur emission can cause premature metal corrosion and subsequent plumbing and electrical system failure, the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDCP) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Diseases Registry (ATSDA) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to investigate complaints about imported Chinese drywall. In a recent briefing for Congress, the CPSC indicated they have requested emergency funds to conduct this investigation and to develop an automated response system and a public Web site dedicated to this issue. Because a great deal of the allegedly tainted drywall appears to have been used in Florida construction, the Florida Department of Health also is conducting an investigation.* The types of alleged physical damage such agencies are attempting to document include:

- premature corrosion on copper wires and evaporator coils of an A/C system (inside the air handler), which can result in Freon leakage;
- premature corrosion on the Freon line of an A/C system, which can cause loss of Freon pressure; and,

- premature corrosion on internal copper electrical wiring system, such as home alarms, telecommunication wiring panels, un-insulated copper pipe and wires running to/from A/C control panels, smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, or other electrical appliances – all of which can cause system failures.

It should be emphasized that studies and assessments are still being conducted, and there does not appear to be a clear consensus among various experts on exactly what should be done to remediate the situation. There are no standard procedures for remediating buildings that contain tainted drywall, and actions taken to address the issue vary by contractor. Outlined below is information about remediation measures that is currently available:

- to deal with risks such as actual or future fire hazards and water damage, drywall of affected buildings may need to be removed and replaced;
- the interior of each building may require cleaning, and replacement of wiring and appliances may be necessary to prevent malfunctioning or fire hazard; and,
- replacement of corroded metal pipes may also be required, as thinning of the pipe wall can lead to potential water leakage.

Current estimates are that as many as 36,000 homes in Florida may contain the particular Chinese-made drywall in question. Thousands of homes in Louisiana, where many tons of drywall was used for reconstruction following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, also may contain this product. In the aggregate, it is reported that between 60,000 and 100,000 homes nationwide may contain the Chinese drywall; in addition to Florida and Louisiana, problems also have been reported in many other states.

Public officials at both state and federal levels are aware of the allegations being made against the Chinese drywall, and are exploring both legislative and regulatory responses. In the meantime, consumers should inquire about materials being used in residential and commercial construction projects. Specifically, consumers involved in current construction projects, as well as those property owners in buildings built, re-modeled, or where drywall was replaced during the last three to five years, should request documentation regarding the drywall used from the builder or contractor.

* For more information on the FDH investigation: <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/ENVIRONMENT/COMMUNITY/indoor-air/casedefinition.html>