

# Lawmaker: Investigate Deaths Linked To Chinese Drywall

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NEW ORLEANS (AP) — U.S. Sen. David Vitter has called for federal officials to do a more thorough review of the deaths of several people who lived in homes that contained smelly, possibly toxic Chinese drywall.

Federal officials at the Consumer Product Safety Commission said they have investigated and found no link between the drywall and the deaths of eight people. They said one of the deaths did not even occur in a house with Chinese drywall.

Scott Wolfson, a spokesman for the safety commission, said the deaths were promptly investigated by staff toxicologists, epidemiologists and other experts by telephone, except for a case involving an asthmatic 9-year-old boy who died in Louisiana. Investigators went to his home and determined his death was not caused by the wallboard, Wolfson said.

"There is no evidence through investigations and follow-up of any correlation between Chinese drywall and the tragic fatalities reported to the CPSC," Wolfson said.

Vitter asked the safety commission and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to do more, though he didn't elaborate in his letter Wednesday to the agencies.

"A thorough review of all reported deaths would help instill confidence in your efforts and provide relief for many families," the Louisiana Republican said.

CDC spokeswoman Bernadette Burden said the agency would review Vitter's letter.

In November, the safety commission said it had found a possible link between respiratory irritation reported by homeowners and higher-than-normal levels of hydrogen sulfide gas emitted from the imported Chinese wallboard coupled with formaldehyde, which is commonly found in new houses.

The agency also said it was likely that wire and pipe corrosion in homes was caused by the imported wallboard.

About 3,000 homeowners, most of them in Florida, Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, have reported problems with the Chinese-made drywall. The consumer commission has reviewed 800 homes, Wolfson said.

"This is the costliest investigation in our agency's history and involves the most number of staff dedicated to one issue," Wolfson said.

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The vast majority of complaints involve Chinese-made gypsum board imported during the recent U.S. housing boom, when domestic building materials were in short supply, and after the catastrophic 2005 hurricane season.

Thousands of homeowners have been kept in limbo as hundreds of lawsuits against builders, contractors, suppliers and manufacturers are winding through the courts and the federal government develops aid plans.

Sen. Bill Nelson, a Florida Democrat, said affected homeowners deserve to know the extent of any health threat. "And what they can do to get the problem fixed so they can live in their own houses," he said.

Dr. Patricia Williams, a toxicologist at the University of New Orleans hired by plaintiffs lawyers, said a more thorough probe was warranted.

"Each person needs to be looked at individually," Williams said. She said her analyses of the Chinese drywall have found chemical compounds that can lead to death, particularly in people suffering from lung and heart disease.

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