

Spray Polyurethane foam manufacturer may face class-action lawsuit



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It is difficult to gauge how often spray polyurethane foam leads to the kinds of [problems experienced by Keri Rimel and her family](#). I compiled dozens of reports of families experiencing problems with spray foam, from [Robert and Cynthia Gibson in Florida](#) to a report of 40 people in the Netherlands who suffer from chemical sensitization after living in homes with spray foam.

A potential class action lawsuit against Barnhardt Manufacturing Co. and a second potential class action lawsuit against spray foam manufacturer Demilec may shed light upon the number of people who have been harmed by spray foam. "We're in the process of discovery to find that out," said Jonathan Shub, a Philadelphia-based attorney at Seeger Weiss, the law firm challenging Demilec. The suit needs a motion to certify the class in order to move forward.

The case against Demilec was filed by Lucille Renzi, who had Demilec's Sealection 500 Polyurethane Spray Foam Insulation installed in her Boynton Beach, Fla. home. According to court documents, the plaintiffs say spray foam "remains toxic after installation because either, as designed, it is impossible to become inert and non-toxic even under optimal conditions; or proper installation (and thus non-toxicity) is nearly impossible given the exacting set of installation requirements and inadequate training and installer certification methods."

"A very very very small incident case"

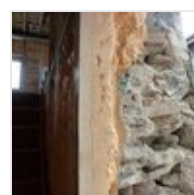
Yet hundreds of thousands of buildings in the U.S. are insulated with spray foam. Robert Naini, the Chief operating officer of Demilec, said that their products are installed in 25,000 buildings per year. Naini said Demilec has "a very very very small incident case."

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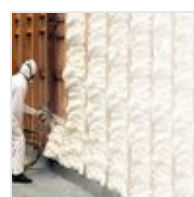
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"Ultimately, what we find in our investigations is the applicators at some level

complaint."

Demilec only sells its product to authorized contractors who have received training either at company's corporate facility or with one of their representatives in the field. The Spray Polyurethane Foam Alliance also offers a professional certification program, which can be completed online. Naini urges homeowners to ask for proof of qualifications from installers when considering spray foam for their homes.

At least nine other lawsuits have been filed against spray foam manufacturers, but for many homeowners litigation against such large companies is out of reach in addition to the expense of the failed installation. In many cases, it is unclear if liability falls on the installer, the manufacturer or both.

"It turned out to be our worst nightmare"

Richard Beyer decided not to sue, but is instead pushing for legislation that required better licensing and training for spray foam installers.

Beyer had both Johns Manville spray foam and Icynene spray foam insulation installed in his Connecticut home as part of an extensive energy retrofit. "The house had this odor like a sweet chemical musty order that never went away," said Beyer. "The installers were telling us that there wasn't anything harmful." Beyer ventilated his home and installed air filters, but it didn't help the smell.

In the winter months, Beyer developed a rash, headaches and respiratory symptoms. He needed to take Benadryl to sleep at night. He didn't immediately connect his suffering to the foam, until a trip to California. His symptoms went away during the trip, but returned as soon as he came home.

It became clear that the foam wasn't behaving the way it should. "It turned out to be our worst nightmare," Beyer said. In some places, it had cracked and shrunken and in other places it was discolored.

Icynene sent a representative to investigate the product, who insisted that the product was fine. Johns Manville collected a sample of their product. Beyer later learned that the Johns Manville terminated their relationship with the contractor, Anchor Insulation, Inc., over their installation practices. Beyer said Johns Manville "had their attorney contact me informing me to stop asking them questions about the health affects and the product chemistry."



© [Cracked and discolored spray foam insulation in Richard Beyer's home.](#)

"Eleven months in, I said to the installer that we have to get rid of this stuff," said Beyer. His symptoms did not subside until the majority of the insulation was removed.

Beyer worries that other homeowners are suffering as he did, but are still unaware of the risks associated with spray foam. "What the industry tries to do is convince us that each incident is an isolated case."

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