

Contaminated Chinese Drywall

Based on records analyzed by the Associated Press, more than 540 million pounds of wallboard (Chinese drywall), including ceiling tile, was imported from China between 2004 and 2008. Most of it was imported in 2006, during a time of a national housing boom and rebuilding/repair required by the devastating 2005 hurricane season along the coasts of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

Recently, complaints of a “rotten egg” odor and various health problems, as well as rapid deterioration of heating and air conditioning coils, appliances, electronics and exposed surfaces of electrical wiring, silverware and other metals, has been correlated to the installation of contaminated Chinese drywall.

The problem appears to be that at least some of the Chinese drywall emits volatile sulfur compounds including Hydrogen Sulfide (H₂S), Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂), Carbonyl Sulfide (COS) and Carbon Disulfide (CS₂). It also appears that high humidity, such as that found along the coasts of the southeastern states, accelerates the emissions.

Identification of the contaminated Chinese drywall has been problematic because over 100 companies have made drywall in China and only a portion of the drywall produced is labeled with the manufacturer and country of origin. Some is labeled “made in China” and the remainder has no label at all. As a further complication, many homes have a combination of US-made and Chinese-made drywall, particularly when the imported drywall was used for water damage repair.

In testing performed by Unified Engineering, Inc., for the Florida Department of Health, Division of Environmental Health, it appears that the contaminated Chinese drywall uniquely had inclusions of Strontium Sulfide and greater than 5% organic material incorporated into the material. The contaminated Chinese drywall, when exposed to moisture and then heated, also emitted a sulfur odor.

Symptoms of contaminated Chinese drywall include:

- Odor of sulfur or rotten eggs
- Frequent repair required on electrical and electronic equipment and appliances
- Replacement of the evaporator coils on air conditioners/air handlers
- Black or dark grey color on exposed copper such as electrical wiring, LP or natural gas tubing, air conditioner/heat pump, refrigerator and freezer tubing.
- Rapid tarnishing of silver jewelry and silverware
- Reported health symptoms have included respiratory symptoms, wheezing, sinus problems and nose bleeds.

AEGI frequently works with origin and cause professionals to evaluate electrical and mechanical components which may have failed due to contaminated Chinese drywall. In addition to component inspection and analysis, AEGI has developed tests to analyze for the presence of contaminated drywall.

For additional information on contaminated Chinese drywall please feel free to contact AEGI at (800) 777-7668.