

# Residents plagued with insulation poison can get it removed from walls

By Jackie Klein  
staff writer

The Southfield-based Urea Formaldehyde Foam Insulation House Doctors International (UFFI) claims to be the only firm in Michigan licensed to "cure" problems in homes insulated with the allegedly hazardous foam.

Southfield home builder Connie Ann Gordon, a partner in the UFFI, has been registered by the Canadian government after taking a course in testing, corrective measures and removal of the substance.

Gordon's partner, Milton Tyner, who is also in the construction business, is qualified to perform the service under Gordon's supervision.

The firm last week sponsored a seminar in Detroit to provide residential building contractors with basic knowledge about UFFI. Emphasis was on remedial measures for homes which have already been insulated with the substance.

UFFI, which was installed in more than 50,000 Michigan homes during the 1970s, was banned last August by the Consumer Product Safety Commission because of health risks.

THE INSULATION is associated with eye, nose, throat and other irritations and has been linked to cancer in laboratory animals.

But the U.S. Court of Appeals in an April 8 ruling agreed with the industry that the formaldehyde gas levels found in test homes were inaccurate indicators and results of animal experiments had doubtful applications to humans.

More than 20 congressmen from all parts of the nation have joined with Congressman Dennis Hertz, D-Harper Woods, in calling upon the consumer commission "to do whatever it can to prevent the ban on the use of urea formaldehyde foam insulation from being lifted."

The commission maintains the court made a number of errors. An extension of time to file a petition for rehearing was granted and the court's mandate overturning the ban is stayed until today.

Removal of the foam can cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000 depending on the extent and location of the insulation, Gordon said. According to Gordon, homeowners can save approximately 35 percent of the cost of removal by taking corrective measures.

"Whatever measures are taken, the contractor must have knowledge of construction or he'll run into problems. There are specific procedures to cure the problem."

Richard Simpson, a consultant with DIDAK Corp. of Ottawa, Canada, conducted the seminar sponsored by the Southfield company. DIDAK is a management consulting firm to the Canadian government.

THE CANADIAN government in 1974 gave grants to homeowners to install UFFI during the energy crunch because of the foam's high insulating value, Simpson said.

But, in 1980, because of "severe health problems attributed to formaldehyde, the government gave residents \$5,000 to remove the substance from their homes or take remedial measures, he said.

"UFFI is an inherently unstable substance. Once in place, it begins to decompose, particularly in the presence of moisture. It emits formaldehyde gas and other substances."

"Although the majority of people living in UFFI-insulated homes aren't

aware of ill effects, many of them report symptoms which are typical of exposure to formaldehyde."

Symptoms, according to Simpson, include irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, nausea, vomiting and nose bleeds. Fungus may grow in the decomposing foam, causing asthmatic problems — wheezing, coughing and difficulty in breathing, he said.

As a result of publicity, consumer advocacy groups have been formed. Among them is Citizens Engaged in Removal of Toxic Substances (CERTS), founded four months ago by a Berkley couple who had problems with UFFI.

The 130-member group hopes to convince the federal government to compensate insulation victims. Congressman Hertz recently introduced a bill which would permit a federal tax credit of up to \$10,000 to homeowners for removal of the substance.

"THE RESALE value of UFFI-insulated homes has dropped and many homeowners need to have the foam removed or treated in order to sell their homes," Simpson said.

# Mihelich hopes for a position on board

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ferred her to Detroit. Several years later she left "TV Guide" to teach English and creative writing at St. Hedwig High School in southwest Detroit.

"I understand some of the frustrations of education from the teacher's point of view," she said.

THE FARMINGTON school board impresses Mihelich, especially when compared to others she's tried to work with.

"From the (board) meetings I've attended, it seems like a lot of work goes into it," she said, "and I like the open atmosphere."

"At St. Hedwig, the board was totally closed. Teachers weren't supposed to attend, and you had to make an appointment to present something. And after the presentation was made, you were forced to leave."

Like some other candidates, Mihelich feels that declining enrollment and the resulting teacher layoffs are problems in the Farmington district.

"I met with Mr. (Lew) Schulman (the superintendent of schools), and I've read his mid-year report and the end report from last year," she said, "and there seems to be a consensus that declining enrollment might be a problem."

"It stands to reason. There are fewer students now, and some adjustments will have to be made to the schools. We'd like to make it as painless as possible."

Farmington, I can't recall any information ever coming to my home."

MIHELICH, who lives in an apartment on Freedom Road, is the only candidate from the city of Farmington. The other five hopefuls reside in Farmington Hills.

"I think there needs to be more representation from Farmington on the board," she said.

Mihelich, who hopes to earn a master's degree in urban planning some day, has served on a parish board in Minnesota and has held positions in Common Ground and the Michigan Diabetes Association in this area.

All six candidates are newcomers to elective politics. Incumbent Michael Shipice, who served two terms on the board, is not seeking re-election.

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