

*Urea Formaldehyde Insulation Act*

**Mr. Friesen:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member would spend some time in the House he would know that we have put up speakers. I am glad that he put in the past tense that he represented the riding because he will not be here next time.

**Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. It is important to point out what has been going on in the House today. Earlier the Conservatives agreed that there would be no House order—that the only House order they would agree to was no debate at all. Then the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) got up and said they wanted time to ask the minister questions. That is completely new. It is interesting that the minister is now back in the lobby dealing with the Conservatives, trying to figure ways of getting them out of this pickle.

I should like to go through the history of the urea foam problem because it is a very serious one. For Parliament to pass a bill that does not deal effectively with the concerns of people who have urea foam in their homes, is inappropriate. There are many people in the country who cannot borrow the \$5,000. The cost of taking the foam out of most homes massively exceeds \$5,000. On average, contractors' bids in the city of Toronto amount to about \$22,000, and for brick homes it is much more.

We have to look at the history of this problem, Mr. Speaker. It was a government that promoted the placement of urea foam in homes. It was installed at home owner's expense but many of them took advantage of the government grant and paid income tax on it.

If you buy a car or a washing machine you have an opportunity to go after the producer if the item turns out to be damaging to your health or if it does not work properly. Because of case law you have a right through the court system to go back to the producer of the item for the cost that you have incurred. In this situation it is a product sponsored by the government which has been demonstrated to be unsafe, so it is important that the government, and the official opposition too come clean and state their positions. The government is offering a very limited program that is only accessible to people who have cash in the bank or who can remortgage their home because they have other assets.

This is completely a class-oriented bill which addresses the wealthier people in the country, not those who are poor, who are on pensions or who would have difficulty refinancing a mortgage.

The question of the value of homes is not addressed in the bill. There are homes in Vancouver, in every city and province in the country that basically are black-listed by the real estate market. People cannot get anything near the price they want for their home, and indeed they should not be able to sell them to unsuspecting buyers.

The consumer has a right, in any legislation brought before the House, to have equal access, but that principle is not contained in this legislation. Perhaps the owners of some wood frame homes in Nova Scotia would benefit from the bill because the cost of removing exterior or interior walls is

relatively low. There is a vapour barrier and the insulation can be removed. This is nearly impossible in larger brick dwellings.

We have to look carefully at how the problem evolved, Mr. Speaker. The foam is an insulating material that is injected in liquid form into the wall cavities of buildings and expands in the wall. The problem seems to arise as the material breaks down after installation, releasing one of its components which is formaldehyde gas, into the surrounding atmosphere. Factors such as improper mix, high temperature, improper placement, moisture, humid conditions or associated fungus activity, have accelerated the decomposition process, resulting in increased gas levels in homes.

As has been pointed out by an expert committee that looked into the problem, the gas can cause eye, nose and throat irritation, nosebleeds, headache, coughing, nausea, asthma-like conditions, vomiting and dizziness. It has been related to cancer in laboratory animals, and I intend to deal with that later.

It is estimated at this point that from 80,000 to 100,000 homes are affected. In about 25,000 of those homes material was installed under the provisions of the Canadian Home Insulation Program. When properly installed in the outside walls, with the right mix and good ventilation, the material has frequently not been a problem. In adverse conditions, however, where one of the many factors above come into play, it has been proven to be a very serious problem indeed. Removal has been difficult and costs already have ranged anywhere from \$10,000 to \$30,000 and above, and it has often proven to be unsatisfactory even after removal. People can be affected and be unaware of the problem.

● (2130)

Let me go back a moment in history, Mr. Speaker, because tonight is one of the last opportunities for Parliament to address itself seriously to this issue. Regardless of whether problems are put to the minister or not we all as Members of Parliament recognize that this legislation cannot be changed tonight. The hon. member for Vancouver South was very eloquent in pointing out that we were putting up speakers and the Conservatives were not. It has been clear for a number of weeks, Mr. Speaker, that the Conservative Party was not seriously interested in getting a bill back before this House which addressed the problem in an equal way regardless of the income factor. In 1969 this product was first accepted in this country by CMHC and was used during that period in some states of the U.S., and in Europe since the 1950s. By 1970 CMHC acceptance was withdrawn because of shrinking and instability of the product. The foam simply was not demonstrating itself to be a good insulating factor.

In August, 1977 CMHC reaccepted urea foam as a safe product, and Rapco Ltd., a company partly owned by the Canada Development Corporation, claimed to have solved the shrinking problem, and Rapco has since been a major producer. In September, 1977, the CHIP program was put in place and the foam was approved for use. In August, 1978, Dr.