

Urea Formaldehyde Insulation Act

Over the past year and a half, as housing critic for our party and as the hon. member representing the riding of Vancouver East, I have spoken many times in the House about the disastrous situation which has affected home owners with UFFI insulation. My constituency office has a headquarters for one urea formaldehyde action group.

The federal government must bear full responsibility for this disaster facing home owners with UFFI. For it to try and say otherwise or even to try to put the responsibility on to the provinces is irresponsible indeed. The federal government endorsed the program and encouraged home owners to use urea formaldehyde insulation under the CHIP program.

For the record, I would like to go over a couple of statements that were made earlier. These will show how long the government has ignored this problem and how long it has been in trying to do something about it. On July 17, 1981, we proposed a financial solution which would help home owners. I demanded in the House that the federal government establish a fund to assist Canadian home owners with the cost of removing UFFI from their homes. After all, we have disaster funds for floods and for fires; surely this is just as great a disaster.

In 1981 we proposed reallocating the \$5 million which the minister was proposing to spend on testing homes with UFFI and also that the \$330 million which had been allocated in 1981 for new insulation programs be reallocated and used as a good start on a UFFI disaster fund. Of course, the government ignored these proposals, just as it ignored repeatedly the need for a major program for these people, not to give information and to set up action phone lines, to which people could not get through, but something constructive. The federal government talked about several million dollars for informational programs as well which did not even get out to local family physicians about the effects on health of UFFI. But what we wanted were funds to be used immediately for the very obvious and well documented problems which were evident and which should have been acted upon in a direct way.

At that time we said also that public health officials in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario had already indicated that the federal government's testing program was unreliable and inconclusive. The affected home owners had called for the removal of the insulation as the only way to ensure further problems would not occur in the future. That was in 1981. Then we move to December 24, 1981 when the government was proposing what it saw, after this long delay, might be the solution. At that time I stated:

The federal government, by making a token tax deduction for removal of urea formaldehyde foam insulation, at last has admitted they have a responsibility for the UFFI disaster. However a \$5,000 tax deduction for only ten per cent of the affected homes falls far short of solving the UFFI problem which the federal government created.

UFFI homeowners are left with devalued properties with little or no resale value. Many people have their life savings invested in their homes which now are contaminated.

As I said earlier, it would cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000 to remove the foam. But to remove the foam—the poison—is the only solution. The federal government endorsed and

promoted the use of this insulation material. The federal government ignored earlier warnings from the National Research Council. The federal government is responsible for both the economic as well as the health problems which it created. UFFI action groups across the country and members of the New Democratic Party have said over and over again that the federal government has been hypocritical by pretending to provide remedial help. The phony aid program, which was part of Bill C-109, is just that. It is available to only a few home owners whose homes have a 0.1 parts per million reading, and to people who have serious health problems.

Many people are not yet aware what their health problems are possibly as a result of UFFI. Perhaps their doctors have not yet documented them. But when I questioned the minister about that, he admitted in the House of Commons that 0.1 parts per million was merely an arbitrary figure. The minister also agreed that individuals react differently to the foam. The more a person is exposed to the foam, the more sensitive a person becomes. Those serious health problems occur as the foam disintegrates. I asked the minister why these limits were set. They are just a waste of money and do not get at the real problem. What happens to people who are forced to move out of their homes? Many have already moved. Some people in my riding have actually had their homes torn down without any guarantee they will be compensated for that. They have rebuilt their homes at considerable risk and a lifetime's indebtedness with today's high interest rates.

The idea of paying \$100 as a sort of downpayment as a prerequisite for testing is unrealistic. This has been a serious problem for senior citizens. Many of our senior citizens worked hard to insulate their homes. They were the ones with older homes who wanted to conserve fuel costs. Most senior citizens cannot afford this \$100 requirement.

There is no real remedy for the disastrous effect of this foam insulation which, as I have said, was sponsored by the government, except for the government to compensate home owners for the complete removal of this insulation.

I might say also, Mr. Speaker, that we have asked the minister, who is so keen on testing and on studies which give him time for the heat to diminish, whether he would do a real estate assessment of the devaluation of property if he feels he needs proof. He has chosen to ignore this request also.

I know we do not need a lot of extra evidence in the record because many people have spoken about this problem. However, I would like to quote from a UFFI Action Association letter. This association operates out of my constituency office. It has members from across British Columbia.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Skelly: No money or government support was involved.

Mrs. Mitchell: This group has been extremely active in research. It has provided valuable data for the government. The December, 1981 letter of the UFFI Action Association of Vancouver reads in part as follows: