

Carmel on the Case

School Mold Infestation Follow-Up

An update tonight to an ongoing problem at some South Florida schools -- 7 News was first to expose. Parents of 20 students suing -- saying the schools are making their kids sick. 7's Carmel Cafiero has the exclusive.

(WSVN) -- The lawsuits name Riverside Elementary in Coral Springs and Indian Trace Elementary in Weston.

They accuse school authorities of years of neglect of mold problems with teachers and students paying the price - with their health.

Reported by:

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The victims' attorney, Joe Osborne says, "These problems have literally turned families upside down. Mother's cried to us that their children lie in bed at night in pain, they can't go to school."

Osborne and Scott Gelfand are the attorneys behind the avalanche of lawsuits.

Gelfand says, "This is not about getting just money for students or teachers. This is about righting a public wrong, a wrong that goes Broward County wide."

The extent of mold problems at Riverside was hidden from public view until Seven News obtained these pictures that showed conditions as school opened last year.

Parent Cara Aliseo says, "They lied to us by knowing there was a problem and not letting anyone else know by covering it up."

Aliseo says her son Anthony was so sick because of mold at Riverside - he had to have surgery at age seven and missed most of first grade.

She is suing.

"I feel it's important to hold them accountable for what they did," she says.

Mary Macfie is also suing.

She says her daughter Heather was sick the entire time she went to Indian Trace Elementary.

"Up until May they were telling us there wasn't any mold in the school," says Macfie.

But she knew the mold existed and used her home video camera to document contamination so extensive - mold was growing through the floor tiles.

Like many other parents - she is angry with school officials.

"It's almost like having a little communist country right here in the state of Florida," Macfie says. "They answer to no one but themselves."

While the number of lawsuits may be a surprise, the fact that the system is being sued shouldn't be.

Last April a grand jury ripped into the school board for its failure to clean up troubled schools... and warned it could be held accountable for making students and staff sick.

Attorney Gelfand says, "In terms of a Grand Jury report specifically coming up with findings against the school system - that has

not happened anywhere else in the country that I'm aware of."

Over the summer, more than a million dollars in mold remediation took place at Riverside.

And authorities are now addressing mold problems at Indian Trace where students eat lunch outside because their cafeteria is contaminated.

Taxpayers who have footed the bills for building, then repairing, then cleaning-up these troubled schools - may now have to pay for damages in connection with these lawsuits.

At this point no one is estimating the cost...But jurors, no doubt, will be asked to put a price on a child's ability to breathe.

Lawyers predict more lawsuits involving more schools will be filed in the future.

The school district says it does not comment on litigation.

If you have a story for Carmel or for more information, contact her at:

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