

Pesticide rids home of bugs, owners

Chemicals blamed:
Family says \$300,000 house makes them sick.

By **Susette J. Burton**
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ORANGE — Ronald and Julie Davis bought their dream house six years ago, but they haven't been able to live there for 14 months.

The Davises claim their family became ill and they had to abandon the \$300,000 home — and everything in it — in March 1991, after a New Haven exterminating company used excessive amounts of pesticide to kill termites, according to a recently filed lawsuit.

The company denies any wrongdoing.

Since then, the Davises and their children have been living in hotels and rented homes, draining about \$75,000 of their finances to pay for medical bills, new clothes and two households.

The Davises, who now are renting a house directly across the street from their own, said their pain and frustration is compounded every time they see their contemporary ranch at 622 Arrowhead Drive, with its swimming pool, deck and playground in back.

"It's been a nightmare — the worst thing that could possibly happen to a family," said Julie Davis, 42. "You have a whole house full of your belongings, but you can't use them. It's hard when the children ask, 'Mommy, can I

respiratory problems.

The state Department of Environmental Protection investigated and found in May 1991 that Acme had improperly applied the pesticide. The DEP stated that label directions for the pesticide say the chemical should not be applied through surface treatments.

The DEP could fine the company but has taken no action yet, according to officials. The department has no authority to order the company to reimburse the family. Several other pest control companies contacted declined to comment on Acme's work at the Orange home.

According to the National Pesticide Telecommunications Network, a federally funded hotline, Dragnet FT is a highly concentrated pesticide. If improperly used, it can be inhaled in quantities sufficient to cause vomiting, diarrhea, irritability and respiratory illness, said Srinu Danturthy, a research assistant at the hotline.

He said the pesticide doesn't directly cause headaches, though the smell of it in the air might conceiv-

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Jim Turrell/Register

Ronald and Julie Davis, top left, and their family in front of their pesticide-contaminated home in Orange.

have my Big Bird?" and you have to say no. . . . It's hard to maintain a normal life through all this."

The family's lawsuit against Acme Pest Control Inc. of New Haven says the company used excessive amounts of the pesticide Dragnet FT.

The Davises contend Acme improperly applied an excessive

amount of the substance to the soil surface in the crawl space below their sunroom.

ably be annoying enough to cause them. Danturthy said ill effects from the pesticide should have persisted only a short time after it was applied. He said the house should have been safe a year later.

Steve Blum, president of Acme Pest Control, said his company did nothing wrong. Blum said his employees did the work properly and safely, as they had on two previous visits to the Davis home.

He said when workers returned to the Davis home after the March 19, 1991, job, they found no excess sample of the chemical in the air.

"We take our environmental responsibility very seriously," said Blum. "We try to use the least toxic chemicals, and my men are well trained in terms of application."

But the Davises don't buy it. "This was our dreamhouse," said Ronald Davis, 57. "Going over there is so horrible, we don't do it anymore. It's such a frightening thing that the kids won't go near the house."

The last time she and her husband entered the home was in January, and she had to wear a gas

mask, Julie Davis said.

"We just had to get out of there," Julie said. "I was getting migraines. The kids were getting sick and throwing up. I was frightened for them."

Living across the street from their vacant house is bittersweet, Julie Davis said.

"This has put us back in a normal routine with the children," she said. "They can play with their friends and get the schoolbus. The bad part is they have to look at the house and can't get to their things."

said he is angry and frustrated that although a year has passed, Acme has not cleaned up their home or accepted responsibility for the damage.

Ronald Davis said the family may lose their house because they have been unable to keep up the mortgage payments.

"This has devastated us emotionally and financially," he said. "I want people to know that this could happen to anyone. If a pest control company screws up, there is no one out there to protect you. You're stuck and on your own."

Register reporter **Laura Johannes** contributed to this story.