

Tarion agrees to 300K payout to Port Sydney homeowners

New home will cost \$475K to build

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MuskokaRegion.com

Thursday, November 14, 2019

PORT SYDNEY – A Huntsville couple has finally gotten some good news a year and a half after finding out their home was rendered unlivable because of black mould.

It was April of 2018 when Mike and Bridget Austin were moving into what they thought was their new home on Beaver Meadow Road in Port Sydney. By spring of 2019 the family, including their two young daughters, were showing signs of illness due to exposure to stachybotrys, a toxic mould. They moved out of the house in April of this year.

Upon investigation and after speaking with neighbours, it was revealed the house they bought as a recent build had in actual fact sat exposed to the elements for a number of years before being completed by a builder and put on the market.

Now, Tarion, the home warranty organization all homeowners must pay when buying a new home, has agreed to pay out the maximum benefit possible to help the Austins tear down and build a new home.

The family was ordered to move out as the home was so thick with mould it was considered potentially deadly. While paying a mortgage on the mould house in Port Sydney they have rented a home in Huntsville and began a long legal battle that continues today.

“We pretty much robbed Peter to pay Paul,” recalled Bridget. “All of our credit lines, everything is maxed right out and we had some donations for GoFundMe that helped us by for a few months.”

She had contacted Tarion in the beginning but was told they were struggling to get in contact with the builder and warranty paperwork had not been filed.

“Tarion did their own investigations and basically said they are going to give us the new home warranty,” Bridget said. “The costs to remediate are pretty much the same amount as building a new home.”

She estimates it will cost \$475,000 to build the new home which won't be started until late spring after the existing home has been demolished.

Melanie Kearns, director of strategic communications with Tarion, issued a statement verifying it had agreed to pay out the maximum warranty coverage to the Austins.

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“When we became aware of the situation, we conducted a review and determined that the home was still covered by the builder's warranty. Since the builder had not addressed the issues, we stepped in to resolve them with the homeowners and are glad we were able to assist,” she said in an email statement.

Tarion will be going after the builder to try and recover some of the costs so the Austins are not taking the company on directly. Austin did not reveal the name of the builder to this newspaper for legal reasons.

What lies ahead is a winter of living in their rental, possibly having to move because the landlord may be selling, and getting ready for demolition and building in the spring. Tarion has agreed to pay some living expenses for the family in the meantime.

“If Tarion had not come along when they did we would be claiming bankruptcy,” Bridget said bluntly.

She said local companies are already offering support, with a floor installer offering supplies at cost, and Muskoka Comfort Systems has donated an HVAC system.

“We're hoping that maybe people in the community that possibly own businesses, such as siding, roofing, drywall, trim doors, windows anything like that, if they can give us any kind of discount to help us save some money, it would be appreciated,” she said.

While her story has been told in both the local and national media, it is worth repeating that Bridget and Mike had gotten an extensive home inspection prior to buying the home, and nothing turned up. The basement had been painted white, but it was when they started to pull up some flooring to do an upgrade that the first signs of trouble were revealed.

Austin says they would have been further ahead if their house had burned down. Insurance offers no coverage for mould.

Their house was full of new appliances that are now covered in mould. The cost of removing them along with furniture and clothing and getting it all cleaned would come in at around \$65,000, with no guarantee the mould is all gone.

“The new house will not resemble the current one,” Bridget affirmed. “I will never want to live in a house that reminds me of this one.”

A [GoFundMe account](#) has been established to help the family with expenses.

