

After 10-year wait, Trois-Rivières homeowners get payout for pyrrhotite nightmare

SNC-Lavalin to pay \$220 million for damage to concrete foundations

CBC News · Posted: Aug 04, 2020 12:23 PM EDT | Last Updated: August 4, 2020



Thousands of homeowners in the Mauricie region have had to replace the foundations of their homes because of damage caused by pyrrhotite. (Jean-François Fortier/Radio-Canada)

Families in the Mauricie region who have been caught in a decade-long legal battle with SNC-Lavalin will be compensated in the coming days for a defective building material used in the construction of their homes.

The engineering firm will distribute \$220 million to 850 families whose homes' foundations were built with pyrrhotite, which, when mixed into a concrete mix, expands when it comes into contact with water and air, causing cracks and swelling.

Michel Lemay, the vice-president of the citizens' coalition that took the case to court, said the victims have been suffering for 11 years.

"These families will finally be able to get back to a more normal life," said Lemay.

In 2014, a Quebec Superior Court justice ruled that SNC-Lavalin was responsible for the damage because one of the company's geologists produced a report stating the concrete was fit for use.

In the Mauricie region, 8,000 houses and commercial buildings were built with pyrrhotite foundation. Repairing one home can cost more than \$200,000.

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SNC-Lavalin appealed the ruling but, in April 2020, the Quebec Court of Appeal sided with the lower court, confirming the ruling. The company and its affiliates were ordered to pay the settlement that had grown from 168 to 220 million to include interest and legal fees.

SNC-Lavalin sought a stay, while the Supreme Court of Canada considered whether it would hear the case.

But Quebec Court of Appeal Justice Dominique Bélanger ruled the company had to pay up front.

"This dispute has gone on long enough," Bélanger wrote in her ruling.

Complex payout

The lawyer representing the victims, Pierre Soucy, said SNC-Lavalin will be transferring the sums over the coming days.

Soucy said the operation is complex, given that some people have died and many families have moved or split up since the beginning of the proceedings.

"There is an enormous amount of data to go through," said Soucy.



SNC-Lavalin was ordered to pay 70 per cent of the settlement because one of the company's geologists produced a report stating concrete made with pyrrhotite was fit for use. (Paul Chiasson/Canadian Press)

A second class-action suit is ongoing for homes built between 1996 and 2008.

Michel Lemay said the outcome of this first legal battle is giving some hope to victims involved in the second phase.

"It's a milestone that is very important for us."

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