

# PINK Glow Throughout the House Meant Misery

*By Robert Horowitz*

For the Branstetter family pink is anything but pretty. It conjures up images of asthma attacks, bronchial infections, skin rashes, sinus problems, headaches and always being tired.

The ordeal started in 1991, and is still affecting the family today. When the Branstetters replaced their aging air conditioning system. Soon after, they noticed dustiness in the house. When the family noticed the house was "sweating" and that water was collecting in some spots, they called the contractor back in. The problem was that they needed more insulation, said the contractor, so **Pink fibreglass insulation** was blown into the attic.

"Well, after that was done, we started noticing a **pink** glow to everything in the house," said Mrs. Branstetter.

The problems intensified. Cheryl had to change the air filters in the system every two weeks, they were always completely clogged. Kimberly's room was very cold and very dusty when the air conditioning ran. And their power bill doubled, to \$350-400 a month. In January, 1992, Kimberly started passing out in school. She passed out during gym. She passed out when she practiced with the flag squad. She had to quit playing the flute in the school band because her lungs lacked sufficient power. Her asthmatic episodes were very severe; turning her lips blue.

"She says it feels like somebody just squishes all of the air out of her lungs," said her mother. "Her throat just swells together like somebody is literally choking her."

"They sent this child through every test you could think of and couldn't figure out what was wrong with her," said Cheryl. "They had her on amoxicillin because she had respiratory and sinus infections all the time."

Kimberly's respiratory infections persisted, so she continued to take antibiotics. Just walking from her bedroom to the living room triggered an asthmatic attack. She slept all of the time. The older daughter was experiencing severe skin rashes; doctors recommended Cheryl change to a hypoallergenic detergent. The health of the entire family was in decline.

"At the time we didn't know what was wrong with us, we all had nosebleeds, we all had fatigue problems and headaches, said Cheryl. "My husband wound up going into the hospital with severe upper respiratory infection. We all had bronchitis."

The family and their doctors were baffled. What was making the Branstetters so ill?

When investigated, the duct system was opened up, contractor and homeowner alike were shocked to find the air-return duct leading back to the air handler, and the air handler itself, packed with **fibreglass**.

"It was literally packed full," Branstetter said.

Young Kimberly's room bore the brunt of the assault, but the whole house was contaminated. The Branstetters had to throw out their furniture, carpeting, bedding and clothes. They cleaned up as best as they could and painted. They lived without heating and air conditioning for three years. Cheryl hoped the family's health problems would go away, but they didn't.

"It just got to the point where we-especially Kimberly, who was having the majority of the problems-couldn't breathe," she said.

The whole family suffered from respiratory infections, and the older daughter, a diabetic, endured some nasty skin rashes. Colds and infections came ever more frequently and lasted longer. The whole family had spent so much time on antibiotics, they wound up on stomach medication as well.

The problem, said Cheryl Branstetter, is getting a doctor who is not afraid to say **Kimberly's problems were caused by exposure to fibreglass**. The facts of the case are not in dispute.

"We have the inspectors; we have everybody saying they screwed up. There's no question of that." said Cheryl Branstetter. "The air conditioning company admits: 'We did put in the system. It is true that we did have fibreglass coming up in the air handler.'"

The Branstetter's legal action sought medical damages and reimbursement for their economic losses.

## **Branstetters' \$125,000 Settlement Feels Like Short End of the Stick**