



This 2006 photograph depicts a frontal view of an adult bed bug, *Cimex lectularius*, as it ingests a blood meal from the arm of a "voluntary" human host. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention photo)

Baltimore family awarded \$90K in bedbug case

By: Lauren Kirkwood Daily Record Legal Affairs Writer October 6, 2015

A Baltimore City Circuit Court jury has awarded more than \$90,000 to a family who moved into their apartment only to find the home "overrun" by bedbugs, forcing them to dispose of their infested possessions and live out of their cars for more than a week.

The five plaintiffs also alleged they were inside the house when an unidentified exterminator, presumably sent by the defendant and property owner K.S.A. Investments LLC, sprayed pesticides on the walls, floors and ceilings. The chemicals aggravated family members' asthma and led to an emergency room visit for plaintiff Lattissia Parker, who was about seven months pregnant at the time, according to the lawsuit.

"The jury recognized that this was an attempt at very cheap self-help, and to the surprise of no one, it didn't help anything. It just made things worse," said Daniel W. Whitney Jr., an attorney for the plaintiffs.

The verdict against K.S.A. Investments, which owned the northeast Baltimore home the family planned to rent, included more than \$72,000 in punitive damages.

A jury of five women and one man deliberated for less than two hours after a two-and-a-half day trial before finding K.S.A. guilty on Friday of fraud, negligence and violating the Maryland Consumer Protection Act, said Whitney, of Whitney & Bogris LLP in Towson.

Whitney & Bogris handles a high volume of bedbug-related cases, including both landlord/tenant cases and lawsuits involving hotels or vacation rentals, he added. A fair number of their cases, including the K.S.A. case, involve



This 2006 photograph shows the frontal view of an adult bedbug as it was in the process of ingesting a blood meal from the arm of a "voluntary" human host. Bedbugs typically feed several times a week, and a population of bugs in a dwelling can "explode," growing from 1,000 to 100,000 in just 15 weeks, according to a lawsuit brought by a Baltimore family who alleged the house they moved into was 'overrun' with the insects. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention photo)

tenants renting Section 8 housing through the housing choice voucher program, Whitney said.

“It’s an unfortunate thing that should never happen, but the reality is that so many of these apartment bedbug cases have such a similar set of facts that it’s not that surprising,” Whitney said. “It certainly is terrible and should not have to happen to anybody.”

Long-term infestation

On May 30, 2013, the plaintiffs — Michael and Lattissia Parker and their three children — signed a 12-month lease agreement with K.S.A. and moved into the home. The company knew the house had a “long-term, ongoing bed bug infestation” that was not eradicated during previous pest treatments, but did not inform the plaintiffs, according to the lawsuit.

On their first day in the house, the plaintiffs saw bedbugs crawling on the walls, ceilings and floors, according to the suit. They called a K.S.A. representative, who told them the home had been treated for bedbugs before and said he would send an exterminator.

That evening, an unidentified exterminator sprayed the house with chemicals while the plaintiffs were inside, the suit states.

All five plaintiffs suffer from asthma, and Lattissia Parker also suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the complaint states. After breathing the chemicals, the family began to suffer coughing fits, wheezing and headaches and had difficulty breathing, the lawsuit states, but they slept at the house that night because they had nowhere else to go.

Later that night, bedbugs crawled on the plaintiffs and on their clothes and belongings, the lawsuit states. The family visited the Housing Authority of Baltimore City to request temporary housing assistance the next day, but were unsuccessful. Instead, they were forced to dispose of their bedbug-infested belongings and live in their vehicles for more than a week.

Several days later, Lattissia Parker went to the emergency room seeking treatment for respiratory distress and bedbug bites, and the other family members also sought treatment for their bites from a primary care doctor, the lawsuit states.

‘Like dining at Fogo de Chao’

Bedbugs typically feed several times a week, and a population of bugs in a dwelling can “explode,” growing from 1,000 to 100,000 in just 15 weeks, according to the lawsuit. The house the Parkers planned to rent had been unoccupied for several months before they moved in, Whitney added.

“A family of five, to bedbugs, after the house has been empty — that’s like being invited to go dine at Fogo de Chao,” Whitney said.

A housing inspector for the city inspected the home after the plaintiffs had moved out and found a “heavy infestation” of bedbugs, according to the lawsuit. A representative from a pest control company that had previously treated the house testified at trial that he had recommended additional treatments, which K.S.A. evidently did not follow through with, Whitney said.

“Second and third treatments are basically standard in the industry. Almost no one-shot treatment gets all the bugs,” he said.

Alan Kreshtool of Kreshtool & Kreshtool P.A. in Owings Mills, an attorney for K.S.A. Investments, was not immediately available for comment on the verdict on Tuesday.

LATTISSIA PARKER ET AL. v. K.S.A. INVESTMENTS LLC

Court: Baltimore City Circuit Court

Case No.: 24C14001967

Outcome: Plaintiffs’ verdict for \$90,525: \$18,000 in compensatory damages, \$72,525 in punitive damages

Judge: Lawrence P. Fletcher-Hill

Dates:

Incident: May 30, 2013

Suit filed: April 7, 2014

Verdict: Oct. 2, 2015

Plaintiffs’ Attorney: Daniel W. Whitney Jr. of Whitney & Bogris LLP in Towson

Defendant’s Attorney: Alan Kreshtool of Kreshtool & Kreshtool P.A. in Owings Mills

Counts: Negligence, fraud and violation of the Maryland Consumer Protection Act

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ABOUT LAUREN KIRKWOOD



Lauren Kirkwood covers the business of law beat at The Daily Record.

