

**Court Orders Owners Of Dilapidated
L.A. Apartments To Pay \$3.5 Million!
(Associated Press)**

Three former owners of a dilapidated apartment with collapsed ceilings, rodents and inadequate plumbing were ordered to pay more than \$3.5 million to 19 tenants and the state.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Alan Buckner ordered three apartment owners to return all rents collected as owners of the 24-unit Rampart-area building. They also must pay tenants \$100 for each day they occupied the building, as well as punitive damages.

"The whole point of this lawsuit was to send a message to landlords that they can't get away with this," said Tai Glenn, an attorney with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. The foundation, which supplies legal aid to the poor, said the amount awarded was the most ever in one of its cases.

The July 29 judgment capped a protracted legal battle by former tenants of the property, who had complained of roaches, collapsed floors and no hot water, heat, gas or electricity at the property.

"It was very difficult," said one tenant, a home-keeper who lived in a single apartment with her three sons. "We had a lot of problems."

Tenants claimed that a rehabilitation project on the building made things worse, with lead levels in dust and paint chips at the site exceeding state and federal limits, said Philip Shakhnis of the Environmental Law Foundation, a plaintiff in the suit.

Investigators from the city's Slum Housing Task Force found numerous violations of health and building safety codes at the property.

One of the owners pleaded no contest to 10 such violations and another to three in 2000.

The tenants' lawsuit filed in 2001 accused the owners of maintaining a public and private nuisance, failing to maintain habitable apartments and violating Proposition 65, which states that businesses that expose people to toxic chemicals must issue warnings.

The judge also awarded \$873,000 to the Environmental Law Foundation, equaling \$100 per day for each individual that lived at the property during a specified period.

Under the provisions of Proposition 65, about \$654,750 will go to the state, Glenn said. Although at least one of the owners has filed for bankruptcy, attorneys from Legal Aid said they plan to help tenants collect the money.

The apartment owners could not be reached for comment

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