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So you are about to buy a new home. The home is in a good school district. This is the home you will raise your family in creating memories that will last for generations.

You are impressed with the builder. You love all the moldings and built-in cabinetry, book shelves and cubbies for displaying things. In this price range it goes without saying you want quality. You're not worried about having to replace anything or remodel the kitchen in a few years because everything is new, high quality made in America. Right?

Yeah, maybe, maybe not so much.

I recently toured several new homes, some still under construction, in the Chicago suburbs with significant asking prices. What I found was truly surprising. With asking prices north of \$700,000.00, you should expect quality materials. I would. As it turns out, you don't get a lot of quality materials or workmanship at that price range in the suburbs of Chicago these days, in most cases. I am sure there is at least one builder out there that still makes sure only quality materials from established manufacturers, fabricators and craftsmen are used in their homes.

Unfortunately, what I found without exception was inexpensive, imported, flat packed cabinetry and plumbing fixtures with very expensive sounding names made from materials of unknown origin wherever it is cheapest. Flanking the cabinetry is built-in case work, casings, fireplace surrounds and mantels and moldings all made from MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard) or whatever is cheaper and paintable. Seems paint can cover a lot these days.

Because these materials are purchased and "Branded" by Import Companies there is almost no way you can be guaranteed the materials are safe and not harmful to your family in my opinion. Even if the importer, seller or builder present you with documentation that states the "brand" of cabinetry used in your home passed some environmental standard or manufacturing standard, they can't prove your cabinetry did. They may not even be able to prove your cabinetry was made in the same factory that made the cabinets that passed.

The average homeowner, home builder or remodeler for that matter probably doesn't realize that a warranty from an import company that contracts out the manufacturing of its products to the cheapest overseas third party manufacturer it can find, isn't quite the same as a warranty from an established manufacturer putting its name on the product. Ever try suing someone or a company in a foreign country?

Without laws or regulations requiring sellers and importers of products being installed in your home to verify the origin make-up of the materials, buyers are on their own. As a consumer you would be better served if, for example, you were told that the moldings surrounding high traffic areas (doors, outside corners) in the home you are about to purchase are not likely to hold up to heavy traffic because they are made of MDF, a relatively soft material?

MDF in the right applications is a wonderful material. For instance, because it holds paint so well, it is great for center panels of cabinet doors. However I would never make a cabinet box out of it. It works well for painted crown molding. At eight feet above the floor it is not likely to get much abuse. Different story for base boards and door jams.

I for one am tired of seeing good unsuspecting people being taken advantage of by “Branding Schemes” and so called craftsmen using paint and calk to disguise poor quality craftsmanship and or potentially harmful materials. I trust a well-informed American Consumer to determine what combination of value and service best fits their situation and family needs. However in these cases it seems to me that key information is deliberately being withheld.

A president of a very eco-friendly cabinet manufacturer in the US told me a few years ago that by law he wasn’t allowed to use the materials in is products that the importers are flooding the market with. Perhaps wanting the government to do the right thing is folly. Until they do, if ever, it’s buyer beware.