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LOCAL NEWS

Heflin contractors file suit

By Wayne Ruple
 Cleburne News Editor
 06-25-2009

Two Jefferson County employees contracted by the City of Heflin to assist in cleanup following the Mother's Day tornado in 2008 have filed a lawsuit in Calhoun County Circuit Court against Wingate Inns International, Inc. and Wyndham Worldwide Corporation, alleging they contracted Legionnaire's disease while staying in Oxford.

The City of Heflin paid for lodging at the Wingate Inn in Oxford for the two men who allege to have become contaminated with Legionella bacteria after use of a hot tub at the hotel.

Birmingham Attorney M. Todd Wheelles, of the law firm Morris, Haynes & Hornsby, is representing the two employees of the Jefferson County Commission in separate lawsuits filed against Wingate Inns International and Wyndham.

In a press release this week Wheelles firm stated, "The lawsuits are related to an incident that occurred in May 2008 at the Wingate in Oxford. The plaintiffs were sent by their employer, Jefferson County, to Heflin to assist with a debris removal project following a tornado in the area and were staying at the Wingate Inn during this project. While staying at the Wingate Inn, the men used the hotel's hot tub which is provided for use to hotel guests. As a result of the use of this hot tub, both men developed Legionnaire's disease and had to be hospitalized."

Legionnaire's disease is an acute pneumonia caused by the Legionella bacteria that can exist in dirty or stagnant water.

Legionnaire's disease can first present itself with flu-like symptoms, but these symptoms can get increasingly worse and eventually be fatal

Wheelles adds, "Both plaintiffs were hospitalized in intensive care units where they were placed on respirators. These two men are still suffering the long-term effect of the Legionella bacterial infection."

He said, "Citizens of the State of Alabama should feel safe and secure in using the recreational facilities provided by a hotel. The plaintiffs are

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hopeful that these lawsuits will result in more responsible management and maintenance of hotel recreational facilities in Alabama."

Rob Myers, Communications Coordinator for Wyndham Hotel Group, in an email to The Cleburne News, stated, "We're unable to comment due to pending litigation."

About Wayne Ruple

Cleburne News editor Wayne Ruple is a native of Ashville. Before coming to Heflin, he worked for three years as a computer systems manager in Birmingham. Ruple has worked for The Sand Mountain Reporter in Albertville, and was the editor of The Independent in Robertsdale. He has also worked for the Shades Valley Sun, the St. Clair News-Aegis and The Daily Home in Talladega.

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