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Orleans Settles Suit By Offering Repairs

Orleans Homebuilder's will spend more than \$1 million to address complaints of residents unhappy with their utility rooms. A class-action settlement, made public Thursday, will affect 3,644 homeowners in The Lakes, Le Club, the Courts at Brookfield and other Orleans built developments. Under the settlement, residents will receive free carbon monoxide detectors, repairs to improve ventilation, and educational classes beginning this summer. **The remedies are expected to cost the Bensalem, Pa.-based homebuilder about \$1.4 million.** Legal fees and costs associated with the suit are expected to cost another \$444,000. All of the affected townhomes and condominiums have 5-by-10-foot utility rooms that house a gas furnace, water heater and clothes dryer. Inadequate ventilation and improper maintenance could cause lint from the dryer to clog the furnace, trapping deadly carbon monoxide gas. The homes were built after 1992. I was more than willing to be part of this as soon as I found out about the issue," said Kettlebrook Drive resident Donald Melnick, a plaintiff in the suit with his wife, Debora. The Melnicks live in a three bedroom townhome in The Lakes with their 7-week old daughter, Bryce. Melnick said he learned about the carbon monoxide danger two years ago from the township fire department, which offered to inspect the utility rooms of concerned residents. "I went out the next day and bought a carbon monoxide detector," Melnick said. His utility room has failed two separate inspections due

to inadequate ventilation. The lawsuit was filed in December 2001 by Haddonfield attorney Philip Steven Fuoco and the **Mount Laurel law firm of Shabel & DeNittis**. More than 1,700 people were represented by the suit. The township joined the lawsuit last May, after high carbon monoxide levels set off a detector and forced a family to leave. "The township is very happy about the outcome," said Deputy Mayor John Drinkard. "The residents that are affected will have their homes made safer through a number of means." The lawsuit will have an impact on future development here as well. "After going through this process, the folks in the township that will review these plans will scrutinize individual models more closely and not take what the says for granted," Drinkard said. Orleans representatives could not be reached for comment Thursday regarding the settlement. If anything, it will make us more acute and more careful of what we're doing in the future," said Raymond C. Holshue, the township's community development director. His office will conduct the inspections, make repairs to improve ventilation and host three seminars during the next three years. At the seminars, residents will learn how to keep their appliances free of lint and dust and how to improve air flow within the room. Residents also can participate in a maintenance program to be funded by Orleans that provides for a one time inspection and cleaning of the utility room appliances, filters, vents and exhaust mechanisms.