

From Moldy Shelves to Leaky Roofs, Senior Says EnVision Repairs a Nightmare; ODR Acknowledges Slow Progress but Promises Oversight

St. Croix homeowner Vera Lindquist says EnVision repairs left her with mold, leaks, and unsafe conditions. ODR Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien admitted progress is slow but said small contractors face labor shortages and supply chain challenges.

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Vera Lindquist, a St. Croix homeowner, says EnVision Tomorrow repairs left her with leaks, mold, and unfinished work, creating stress and unsafe conditions.

Homeowner Vera Lindquist is at her wit's end. She says that the dream of having her storm-damaged home restored to its former glory through the EnVision Tomorrow program has turned

into a nightmare. Ms. Lindquist cites shoddy work by the contractor and lack of adequate communication from Office of Disaster Recovery officials as the reason for her distress.

"I have a contractor that is not sticking to the agreement," Ms. Linquist told the Consortium in an exclusive interview. "He is not sticking to the SOW, which is known as the scope of work." The former teacher says things began to go wrong from the very beginning. "When they first came to my house, they put some doors in that were not the doors that I had ordered." As Ms. Lindquist explained, a precise listing of all the items and materials that would go into the construction project was prepared before work began. "We were allowed to choose what we wanted, and it was checked off with the person that we were sitting with."

Ms. Lindquist says she asked for the doors to be changed, but that was only the beginning of her tale of woes. "When they brought the wood and put the shelves in one of the bedrooms, it was nothing but mold." At first, she said the contractor tried to treat the issue on site. "He was treating the wall with more mold spray. Eventually that didn't work, and they had to change those shelves."

As the rehabilitation work continued, Ms. Lindquist's list of complaints also grew. The installation of replacement windows was also problematic, said the retiree. "I love the windows," Ms. Lindquist gushed, before explaining that "the winders that they put on them, the winders do not open the windows all the way, and [they] do not close some of the windows all the way." Additionally, the window screens reportedly lack the tabs required to pull them out for cleaning. "I refuse to take a knife [to be] pulling up screens," she declared.

"I'm going to list these things because it's seniors that they're dealing with," Ms. Lindquist declared, stating that she knows of several other elderly residents who are experiencing similar difficulties with their EnVIision Tomorrow-funded home repairs. "I think they need to get something done about that...one of the frames shakes when I am opening one of the bedroom windows, and it's kind of scary," she said.

The kitchen is another area that needs remediation, Ms. Lindquist says. Again, the contractor has reportedly failed to follow the agreed-upon scope of work. Some of her original cabinets contained two shelves, while the replacements were only fitted with one. "I do not want them to bring in my house a cabinet with just one shelf, because then I will have to find places to store the things that came off of those double shelves," she noted. "I'm not looking for any extra work," said the septugenarian. "I'm tired, I'm stressed. I would like them to bring the correct cabinets they claimed were coming from Puerto Rico."

"Monies were appropriated for my house, and apparently the contractor is bringing what he wants to bring in the house," she complained.

Ms. Lindquist says that apart from the inconvenience of not receiving the items that were agreed, the contractor's alleged shoddy work is also causing health and safety hazards in the home. The unfinished cabinet work has meant that the tiling of the kitchen floor cannot yet be completed. When she is at her sink, "I have to stand in between those tiles by the cabinet on the floor, and when I step back, I'm looking to fall," she explained.

"This has been going on since March...and this is now August, getting ready to go into September." Ms. Lindquist is worried about what might happen to her if she is indeed injured in her kitchen one day. "If I fall and bust my head...what is going to happen to me? My daughter is at work," Ms. Lindquist said.

“Good monies have been appropriated for this house. It's not for anyone to keep, it's for them to invest it...by putting the right things that were requested in the house.”

Ms. Lindquist's contractor woes extend to the roof, which reportedly has multiple leaks. “I have to put paper around one of the bedrooms, because the water is dripping from the ceiling,” she said. “These are areas where they went up on the roof to fix – that has not been fixed.” Recent rainfall left water running down the wall, she said, both from the leaky roof and from a window that is unable to close. “There was water all over the floor,” she lamented.

While the contractor reportedly wanted to begin work on the exterior, Ms. Lindquist says that she will not allow anything else to be done to the house unless the interior work is completed to the expected standard. “There's still the electrical to be done, there's still the cabinets to be done, there's still the tabs to be placed on the [window] screens,” she said. “The roof is leaking, the pump is not placed on the roof. There's mold and bubbles coming back in the ceiling inside the house [from the water],” she lamented, also noting the alleged “sloppy paint job” that was done.

The ordeal has been taking its toll on the elderly woman. “I've been in my bed this whole week because of the stress, and my pressure going up,” she said.

Apart from the complaints about shoddy work and sub-par materials, Ms. Lindquist says the workers have created hazardous conditions on the outside of her property as well. A hole dug for a meter has been left open, and now the grass has grown up over it, creating a trip-and-fall trap for an unsuspecting individual. “If anything happens and I have to go out there, like a hurricane, I'm going to bust my behind in that yard,” she declared.

Perhaps angered by Ms. Lindquist's intolerance of sub-par work, the contractor has now reportedly ceased communicating with her. Her assigned project manager has also apparently gone silent. “You don't answer your phone anymore, and all communication has stopped, and my house is at a standstill,” she complained.

Left in limbo, she is now pleading with authorities to exercise better oversight over the EnVIsion process. Ms. Lindquist says that the slow pace of work has meant that some seniors in the program did not survive to see their homes completely refurbished. “I have three girlfriends that died before their house was ever finished. This is very sad. It seems like they're killing us off one by one with the stress,” Ms. Lindquist lamented. She noted that a trip to the mainland for medical attention, due since May, has had to be postponed indefinitely due to the confusion at home. “This is really, really sad, what you guys are doing to the elders.”

She says the contractor is to be blamed for the situation. “He is not sticking to the agreement,” she declared. “He's not sticking to the scope of work.” The contractor also does not supervise the work that is being done, she claims. “He doesn't come to observe, he just drops off and he leaves.” His idea of supervision, Ms. Lindquist says, is to review photos his workmen have taken of their projects. “I had to go outside and paint the trimming. That's not what I'm supposed to do.”

She called on high-ranking officials, including senators and the governor, to “put on a t-shirt, some jeans and sneakers, and start going to these different places. Houses are not being done the correct way,” she declared. “Tell them to take the money that has been appropriated for these homes and spend it on the homes...they're doing a sloppy job and not using the money for the houses the way it should be spent,” she claimed.

At the end of the day, Ms. Lindquist says her demand is simple. “I want the things done correctly. I don't want any cheap stuff brought to my house...I want my yard clean, it's a filthy stinking

mess.”

When asked for comment, Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien said complaints about deficiencies may be premature. “It's not like the house is finished, the house is still under construction,” she explained. On the pace of work, Ms. Williams-Octalien acknowledged that the contractor has been slow but added that efforts are underway to address the issue, noting the company is “somebody that we're working with very closely to get their performance up.”

Director Williams-Octalien spoke of the difficulties the program is facing in finding enough contractors with the wherewithal to execute projects on time. Many are short on labor and capital. “Keeping the manpower on the homes to finish within schedules is challenging for some of these small contractors,” she explained. Supply chain issues could be affecting others. “I have like, 18 homes that's like 85 to 90 percent complete, and getting them across the finish line is a task,” she admitted.

Making an intervention in Ms. Lindquist's case, said the director, has drawbacks that might nullify the benefits. Terminating the contractor and putting the reconstruction project back out to bid would push the timeline for completion back several months. The solicitation process alone would take at least four months, Ms. Williams-Octalien says, “and then you start over with this new contractor.” The homeowner's interests would be better served by working with the current contractor to improve service delivery. She promised to continue doing just that, with a better oversight framework to ensure better performance.

“We are pushing through to get to the end of the house,” Ms. Williams-Octalien assured.