

**First Landmark case in US
alleging mold exposure causes
Parkinson Disease**

**Alan Bell represents former Olympic
CEO suing landlord and multi-state
property management company**

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Can mold exposure cause Parkinson's disease? Colorado Springs family hopes to prove "landmark" legal case

Steve Locke, former head of several Olympic sports organizations, says poor condition of his apartment caused disease



Linda Kilis, left, and her husband Steve Locke in front of the Signature at Promontory Pointe Apartments in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025. (Photo by Hyoung Chang/The Denver Post)

A Colorado Springs family hopes to win what they believe would be a landmark legal verdict by proving to jurors next month that mold exposure in a rented apartment caused Parkinson's disease in a former head of several Olympic sports organizations.

Steve Locke saw his active life turned upside down by discovering he had Parkinson's in 2015. Six months prior, Locke, his wife Linda Kilis and their young son had moved into the Signature at Promontory Pointe, an apartment complex located at 380 N. Limit St. in Colorado Springs.

After the move, Locke's health began to decline as he experienced an abnormal gait and tremors. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's, but tested negative for the gene that can cause the disease, according to the family's 2022 lawsuit in El Paso County Court that is scheduled to go to trial Feb. 24.

Additionally, his son, then 5, exhibited motor and verbal tics, and was diagnosed with asthma, after living in the apartment. Kilis experienced memory loss, temperature dysregulation and multiple chemical sensitivity, the lawsuit said.

For years, the family said they didn't know where these health problems came from — until the ceiling of their property began caving in due to excessive leaks. Contractors working on the damage discovered "significant amounts of mold on the ceiling, floors and walls" of their apartment, according to the lawsuit.

"This is the first case in the history of the United States we're able to show Parkinson's was caused by this mold exposure," said attorney Alan Bell, who took over the lawsuit in 2023. "We have blood tests that corroborate that. We have brain scans, urine tests. It all fits together. It's a tragedy. To have the kind of evidence we have makes this a landmark case."

The family's attorney said the property management companies being sued — Griffis Blessing Inc. and Brown Signature LLC — knew about the leaks and did not properly address the problem, leading to the family's "catastrophic injuries."

"They were cutting corners to save a buck instead of saving a life," Ball said. "They put profits over people."

Kimberly Viergever, an attorney representing both defendants, said that because the case is going to trial, she can't comment on ongoing litigation.

"This really upended our lives"

Locke was a physically active man who had tackled triathlons and oversaw the U.S. operations for a number of Olympic sports, serving as the head, in various years, of USA Triathlon, USA Water Ski and USA Field Hockey. His wife described him as a workaholic who loved to stay busy.

During a recent video interview, Locke had such difficulty speaking — a symptom he attributed to his Parkinson's — that his wife had to step in to communicate on his behalf.

After the mold was discovered, Kilis said property management would not provide mold testing.

"This really upended our lives," Kilis said, noting that she and her husband had to end the careers they loved and the whole family suffers from difficult health problems. "The hardest part for me is that this took my son's dad away. He wanted to teach our son to ski and go hiking and biking, and now it takes him 30 minutes to get dressed in the morning."

Kilis said their insurance company "aims to silence" them with settlement offers that would require them to sign non-disclosure agree-

ments and prevent a jury trial. To fight the insurance company, Kilis started a GoFundMe.

Kilis researched the health effects of living with mold and found studies linking mold toxins to movement disorders like her husband was experiencing.

Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder that often causes tremors, motor dysfunction, stiff limbs and gait and balance issues, according to the Parkinson's Foundation. Scientists believe genetics and environmental factors cause the disease, which has no cure. Treatment options include medications, lifestyle changes and surgery, the foundation said.

Researchers have linked Parkinson's to environmental toxins and, more recently, linked symptoms of Parkinson's disease to fungus.

Depositions provided by the family's attorney describe a former maintenance worker at Signature at Promontory Pointe stating that there were "a significant number of water leaks and water intrusions" at the time Locke lived there and that it was known that leaks were "an ongoing problem," but that the property management company chose not to address issues due to budgetary concerns.

Locke and his family ordered third-party testing that confirmed the presence of mold, Bell said. Bell said lab tests confirmed mold byproducts were excreted in Locke's urine, showing his exposure to mold toxicity.

"Parkinson's is caused by a lot of things"

Joan Bennett, a professor of plant biology and pathology at Rutgers University since 2006, who is not involved in the lawsuit, spoke to The Denver Post independently about mold's potential links to Parkinson's.

She was working at Tulane University in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, flooding her house, which became infested with mold. Bennett collected samples of the mold and started feeling terribly sick during her research.

Bennett wanted to understand the connection between molds and symptoms like she had experienced. Her research found that an organic compound known as mushroom alcohol can cause movement disorders in flies. It also found that it attacked two genes that deal with dopamine, causing Parkinson's-like symptoms.

"I personally believe that Parkinson's is caused by lots of things, but one of them might be some of these volatile agents," Bennett said. "Whether that can be shown in a mammal, the research hasn't been done."

Bennett tried to get grant money to do her research on mice or rats multiple times but hasn't been successful.

Bell, the family's attorney, said he almost died from an environmentally linked illness in the late 1980s that he believes he sustained from the building his law practice was in. Now, he fights for others suffering from environmentally linked illnesses, he said.

"In the state of Colorado, the landlord has a duty to provide a safe place for its tenants to live in," Bell said. "When a landlord either knew or should have known it's unsafe, it's their duty to make it safe...They didn't do that. They put a Band-aid over a huge wound."

Link to Original Article

<https://www.denverpost.com/2025/01/27/mold-exposure-parkinsons-disease-colorado-springs-lawsuit/?share=osea-2c7isswsvwesnpom>

Alan Bell's Official Website

www.alanbell.me

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