

NEWS

From the Office of the City Attorney
ROCKARD J. DELGADILLO



Suite 800, City Hall East
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Phone: 213-978-8340 Fax: 213-978-2093
<http://www.cityofla.org/atty/index.htm>

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Contact: Frank Mateljan
(213) 978-8340

City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo Urges Jail for Owners of Morrison Hotel

Slumlords, Convicted on 21 Counts, Hid Behind Web of Businesses

LOS ANGELES – City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo today urged a Los Angeles judge to send the owners of the Morrison Hotel to jail following their recent conviction on multiple criminal counts of fostering slum conditions at the property.

Brothers Sauli Danpour, 48, and Henry Danpour, 53, control the company that owns the Morrison Hotel, 1246 S. Hope St. They and two of their businesses were each convicted of 21 counts alleging they violated sections of the city's fire and housing code and the county's health code. The City Attorney is requesting jail time or detention at the Morrison Hotel for both individuals and the maximum financial penalty for the corporate owner. In addition, the City Attorney will request Phoenix Mortgage Corp., which is controlled by the Danpours, be ordered to bring the Morrison Hotel into compliance as well as pay restitution and costs.

A criminal complaint was filed by the City Attorney's Housing Enforcement Unit in November 2004 after the owners repeatedly failed to bring the building into compliance. Following a four-day bench trial, Judge Bernard Kemper found the four defendants guilty on 21 counts. Tenants of the building, organized by Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), aided in the investigations and are engaged in a civil suit with the owners.

"The tenants, SAJE, the inspectors and the prosecutors have done their part, they have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the Danpours are guilty," said Delgadillo. "We are imploring the judge to seize the moment, to send these men to jail and send a clear message to anyone who seeks to enrich themselves by ignoring our laws and victimizing the poor."

The Morrison Hotel is a four-story residential hotel with 111 units. The case against its owners began in Spring 2004 with inspections by the Inter Agency Housing Task Force, whose members included representatives of the city's fire and building and safety departments and the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services. Following the inspections, the owners were informed of the existence of approximately 100 violations, including a lack of heart in the building, locked fire doors, vermin and insect infestation as well as an inoperable fire suppression system.

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“Today we have an opportunity to take a strong and decisive stand against landlords that continue to neglect their properties to the detriment of the health and welfare of some out city’s most vulnerable residents. The owners of the Morrison Hotel have created a slum housing situation and they must be penalized,” said Councilwoman Jan Perry. “This is yet another example of why we need to work hard to preserve quality, affordable housing and stop the systematic destruction of this housing stock through disinvestment and neglect.”

The Danpours are the second set of slumlords to face jail in as many months. In late November, Last month, Esteban Sia, owner of a 10-unit apartment building in South Los Angeles, was ordered to surrender to jail after repeatedly failing to meet court imposed deadlines to make needed improvements. He was sentenced to 60 days in jail by Judge Daniel Feldstern after failing to bring his apartment building into code compliance by a court-ordered deadline. It was Sia’s second jail sentence on slum housing charges.

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