

## Swiss businesswomen 'eaten alive' by bedbugs in New York hotel, lawyer says

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November 30, 2005, 7:15 PM EST

NEW YORK -- Two Swiss businesswomen who spent a week at Manhattan's Hotel Pennsylvania in September have filed a lawsuit saying they had a lousy time trying to sleep there because they were bitten by bedbugs.

Ksenija Knezevic, of Zurich, and Marlies Barisic, of Kreuzlingen, both in their early 30s, say the bloodsucking insects began attacking Sept. 17, the night they checked into the hotel across from Madison Square Garden.

The women's lawsuit, filed in Manhattan's state Supreme Court, says they suffered bedbug bites over their torsos, arms and legs. Their lawyer, Alberto Ebanks, said bugs also bit their cheeks and necks and caused possibly permanent scarring.

"They were eaten alive," Ebanks said Wednesday.

He said the women had to seek medical treatment while in New York, where they were given antibiotics, and when they returned to Switzerland. He said photographs of the women's wounds are "gruesome."



Ebanks said that when the women told employees of the Seventh Avenue hotel that they were uncomfortable and something was wrong, one immediately exclaimed, "Bedbugs!"

"That tells us that this hotel was certainly on notice that they had a bedbug problem," the lawyer said. "They knew what was going on, but no one wanted to stand up and take responsibility the right way."

Ebanks said the women "came here looking for a New York experience and looked

forward to their vacation." He said both are now seeing a Swiss dermatologist.

Ebanks said one of the women tried to enter her office the day after she returned to Switzerland, but "she wasn't 10 feet into that office when a co-worker told her she looked terrible and asked her to please go home immediately."

Court papers say that because of the hotel's "extreme and outrageous" negligence regarding the bedbug assaults, the women have suffered "physical pain, mental anguish, emotional distress and lost earnings."

The lawsuit names the hotel and owners Vornado Realty Trust, 401 Hotel Management Co. LLC and 401 Hotel TRS as defendants. It seeks unspecified damages.

Roann Kulikoff, a spokeswoman for the hotel and its owners, said her clients did not comment on pending litigation.

Ebanks was the lawyer for two Mexican businessmen who sued Leona Helmsley's upscale Park Lane Hotel in 2003 after they complained they had been dined on by bedbugs. That case reportedly was settled confidentially in 2004.

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