



DIRTY DIGS: This building was occupied by rats, cockroaches and a family of six for four years.

High Court upholds record fine for filthy rental home

by **Scott MacLeod**

A record fine imposed on two people who leased out an unsanitary building has been upheld by the High Court.

Aik Guan Law and Kim Lan Lai were fined \$40,500 in the Waitakere District Court in May last year after they rented out their converted garage in Rathgar Rd, Henderson.

Waitakere City Council officers found rats, cockroaches and water could enter through holes in the outer walls, food storage was poor, the washing machine discharged into the kitchen sink and electric fittings gave electric shocks when touched.

Law and Lai appealed against the decision, saying the fines were too big, the dampness was caused by the tenants growing cannabis in a bedroom, and that they were poorly represented at the first hearing.

Law and Lai leased the building to Moana Te Whata, her partner Karl Murphy and up

to four children for \$180 a week. They lived there for four years.

Justice Rhys Harrison said he could accept that Mr Murphy and Ms Te Whata grew cannabis in a bedroom, but it was "not enough" to explain all the dampness.

Lai and Law's lawyer, John MacRae, argued that the fines were excessive because the landlords had known little about the building's condition.

But Justice Harrison said the fines were not excessive.

Waitakere Mayor Bob Harvey said he was "delighted" by the result.

"I hope this serves as a warning to other landlords who feel tempted to treat their fellow human beings like this."

Lai and Law said the fine was "a lot of money" and they were "still wondering what to do about everything".

They were no longer leasing out the building.