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## Fair Go: \$3K outdoor furniture set no match for the elements

Mark Hooper couldn't believe that an outdoor furniture suite he bought couldn't be left outside.

### Fair Go brings you the story of the \$3000 outdoor furniture that wasn't

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Mark spent thousands on an outdoor furniture suite, but after a year, the cushions started to disintegrate. (Source: Fair Go)

He bought it for just over \$3000 from Freedom Furniture. He assumed he'd bought a bad batch when, after just a year of use, the cushions started to disintegrate and give off a powdery white substance.

But when he approached Freedom for a replacement, the company said it had been in touch with the supplier "who refused to accept that it was a manufacturing fault" and said the product must have come into contact with water.

Mark readily admitted that occasionally there would have been contact with water. The suite was placed near their swimming pool and would sometimes be left out in a shower. Other than that, he said they would bring the cushions in if the weather turned.

Mark continued to fight his case. He referred to another, more expensive, outdoor suite that he'd used for much longer and was still in good condition.

But Freedom Furniture stood its ground, making bolder claims each time, saying the cushions must have experienced "prolonged exposure to water" and then that they'd been "immersed in water".

Mark didn't think this was right so he came to Fair Go. He explained that while the suite originally looked great and was comfortable, he believes it's not fit for purpose, "it's a product I probably wouldn't buy again to be honest based on the fact we pretty much have to take it in every night".

Fair Go contacted an expert in the field of outdoor fabrics, Peter Heslop. He used to work for an outdoor fabric company and now researches fabric innovation at Auckland University of Technology.

In his opinion, "outdoor furniture should be fit for purpose, it should be able to withstand the elements. Having said that in the winter months it probably makes sense to tuck it away".

Peter Heslop explains that New Zealand weather is tough on fabric. Not just the rain but UV rays too. However, with reasonable care, he says it should remain in a good condition for five to ten years despite getting wet in showers or being located close to pools and spas.

Fair Go contacted Freedom Furniture with this information. This time there was a much better response.

A spokesperson told Fair Go: "We apologised to Mark Hooper for the bad experience. This issue is an isolated incident and we're discussing it with our manufacturers. Freedom has provided a full refund".

Mark was both surprised and incredibly grateful.

"You're like the fairy godmother of woes. She [the Freedom representative] said it was the least she could do, plus she'd give us some vouchers, and she was just so apologetic about how it was handled."

Mark's also keen to take on board the tips provided by Peter Heslop for any future furniture purchases.

The key is to ask the salesperson directly if the warranty covers damage by UV rays and water exposure, and to check how long the warranty lasts.

It's also a good idea to find out if the foam used is able to drain water rather than soak it up like a sponge, and to opt for fabrics that have proven durability such as Sunbrella.