

Turn Your House Around With A Crawl Space Vapor Barrier

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The vapor barrier in a crawl space performs an important role in a home's durability, energy performance and healthfulness, but these are all dependent upon whether the barrier has been installed correctly. We can begin to understand such benefits by understanding the difference between buildings with and without said barriers.

What's the Difference?

In a vented and unfinished crawl space, moisture from the soil (and from standing water, from leaks) creates very high humidity in this confined space. Moist outside air can enter through vents, adding more moisture. In this super-moist environment, mold will grow on wood and paper-backed fiberglass batts; wood will begin to rot; and steel (ductwork, water heater, HVAC equipment) will rust.

What a Vapor Barrier Does

It's meant to prevent the above mentioned damage. When effective vapor installation is combined with sealing up the vents, this treatment is often referred to as "crawl space encapsulation." Encapsulation is the preferred treatment because it eliminates moisture-related problems like mold while also significantly improving home energy performance.

What is A Vapor Barrier Exactly?

It isn't a single impermeable membrane, but it is expected to perform like one. You can create this effective barrier by overlapping different sheet materials and sealing seams with tape and/or caulk. The barrier that covers the dirt floor is typically thick, durable plastic sheet material. If a crawl space is constantly filling with water, then a waterproofing system such as a drainage pipe or sump pump may need to be installed ahead of the vapor barrier. This will correct the leaking problems instead of covering them up with the barrier.

This barrier for the walls can be made from a plastic sheet material or it can take the form of foil facing rigid foam insulation. This insulation will be used to insulate the walls. In all cases, any seams between foam panels or plastic sheets must be sealed with special tape to keep the barrier continuous.

While wall and floor treatments constitute the main parts of a crawl space vapor barrier, other measures may also be necessary. For example, if the foundation wall is made with concrete blocks, the open cores of the blocks need to be covered and sealed at the top of the wall. You may also want to air-seal the rim joist by filling gaps and cracks in this area with caulk or spray foam insulation.

Once this work is completed, you won't need to worry about the damaging effects of mold, the presence of insects and other pests, and the energy-sapping effects of an unsealed crawl space.

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