

# The MONSTER Under the House

*Don't let it ruin your investment*

When I was a boy, my big brother used to tease me, trying to scare me with stories about a monster under the house. We laugh about it now, but it turns out there may actually be a monster under there, just not the one I imagined. The real monster doesn't have fangs and claws, and it isn't after the people in the house, it's after your house itself . . .

Bill Hughes, owner of Clean CrawlSpace, of Napa Inc., describes the monster in one word: Moisture. Moisture from rain, moisture from humidity, moisture seeping from the ground itself; moisture that rots the wood even in new houses, causing mold problems, structural problems, insect problems and costs homeowners thousands of dollars in repairs and higher health and utility bills.

Bill Hughes, a Napa resident since 1965, has been in and around construction all his life. In 1991 he earned his contractor's license and started his own construction company.

At first he specialized in cabinetry, remodeling kitchens and bathrooms. Over time, however, he found himself dealing with more and more "water intrusion" issues.

During a job at a large community of condominiums Bill and his crew discovered a huge amount of moisture damage under the floors of many of the units, though the buildings were not very old.

"We started researching different ideas to fix those issues," said Bill. "There was mold, rot and damage everywhere. It was all related to the moisture coming from the ground."

Their first approach was to put a layer of visqueen plastic on the ground to act as a vapor barrier. They then installed high-volume power ventilation systems to keep the air moving.

And that's the traditional approach to this mostly-ignored problem: Keep the air moving and ventilate. That's why all houses have those vents at intervals near the ground; the idea is that the vents will help the flow of air and keep moisture from building up. The problem is that it doesn't work because it only goes after the symptoms.

One day Bill was shown a new system by a friend. Rather than a vapor barrier, this was a total "encapsulation system," one that completely sealed everything under the house, covering the ground, the concrete

foundation wall, even those vents we just mentioned.

"It seemed like a bizarre approach," said Bill. "Everybody always thinks the answer is to increase the ventilation. This was the opposite of everything we've always been taught."

Bill and his son Nicholas, 21, who has worked with his father for four and a half years, supervising, organizing job flow, and handling marketing, flew to Connecticut to visit the company that designed the system and became certified in its use and installation. Bill became such a believer in the system that he formed a new company, Clean CrawlSpace of Napa Inc., and has been helping homeowners fix their crawlspaces ever since.

"Rather than ventilate," said Bill, "we completely seal it off with a seven-layer polyethylene liner. No moisture can penetrate the material. It doesn't give off any gasses and it lasts a lifetime. The vents can be sealed too. There's no need for them anymore."

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Bill and Nicholas Hughes of Clean CrawlSpace of Napa Inc.



The process is simple. First a systems designer will go under your house to see how bad it is. While under there he will take photos of problem areas that he can show you on his laptop computer right there in your home. Then the crew will clean paper, wood, trash and debris from the crawlspace. They pump out any standing water and lay down the liner which wraps up to two or three inches from the top of the foundation wall. Every three feet or so it is attached with nylon fasteners and then sealed along the top with a polyurethane sealant.

When Bill and his crew are done, that disgusting, dirty space under your home, from one end to the other, is clean, sealed and dry. The

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barrier stops all moisture from entering from the ground. This barrier also helps to prevent against insects, spiders and is a deterrent against termites.

There are other benefits as well. Nicholas tells of one woman who, just four days after the installation of an encapsulation system under her home, reported that the ongoing musty odor had subsided and that her breathing was less labored, a result of the mold spores under her house being reduced. Other relieved customers report a sharp decline



Above: Damage found in the crawlspace of a home less than seven-years old.

in spiders and insects in their homes. Still others noticed that their floors are warmer and their utility costs have dropped. All praise the Clean CrawlSpace crew and their professionalism.

"Our crew is conscientious and polite," said Bill. "They try to have as little impact on your home as possible while they work and they leave things clean."

It turns out that moisture damage under houses is extremely common. Many of the homes Bill and his crew inspect have large areas of standing water just sitting there rotting everything. They showed me photos of wood support beams under a home less than seven-years-old which were completely rotted through, with mold covering them.

"This is the best preventative maintenance that you can do to a house," said Bill. "It's going to do more to eliminate problems down the road than anything you can possibly do. People resist the concept at first. So did we. But after we sit down and show them photos from under their house and educate them about the real issues, they understand.

"Most people just look at the symptoms," he added. "We have always worked at finding the underlying problem. We find out what's causing the symptoms and we fix it."

Since their inception, the Clean CrawlSpace of Napa, Inc. crew has done nearly one-hundred homes in the Napa Valley. They have hundreds of photos of their work. The "before" photos may surprise and horrify you. It can get pretty ugly down there when moisture and mold have taken hold. The "after" photos though, all show a neat, clean and most importantly, *dry* crawlspace, free from insects and mold. Oh, here's another benefit: It's so nice and clean and dry—all the time—under your house after having this done that if you have enough height down there you can actually use it for storage.

Bill will come out and inspect your home at no charge to see if you have a problem already. In addition, they have a free, full-color booklet titled "Crawl Space Science – What to have done . . . and why," that will answer a lot of your questions.

Is there a moisture monster under *your* house? Do yourself and your house a favor. Give Bill and Nicholas at Clean CrawlSpace of Napa, Inc. a call and if it's under there, they'll send him packing.

*Clean CrawlSpace of Napa is located at 1605 Action Avenue in Napa. Call 707-258-8838 for more information or to schedule an inspection. Visit their website at [www.cleancrawlspaces.com](http://www.cleancrawlspaces.com).*