

Complete coverage best for damp crawl space

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Q: My house is built on a crawl space, and I covered it with poly sheeting. I left 2 feet uncovered coming out from each wall. Is this correct, or is there any problem just covering all the dirt? Also, what is the heaviest mil recommended?

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e-mail

A: To answer your question I would need to know how wet your crawl space is. Leaving an uncovered area around the perimeter of the crawl space floor is a traditionally accepted method. The idea is that the moisture in the soil will escape from the edges of the plastic covering and ventilate to the exterior through the vent openings in the foundation walls. However, as building scientists gain more knowledge about crawl space moisture and we become more concerned about mold growth in damp environments, some of the conventional wisdom is changing.

If your crawl space is extremely wet (i.e. standing water), I think you have done the right thing. When a crawl space is extremely wet, all of the lumber in the house may be swelled. Completely covering the crawl space floor may dry the lumber out too quickly, with unwelcome results as the lumber shrinks from drying. However, if the soil in your crawl space is just damp, I recommend completely covering the soil. I have read that approximately 12 gallons of water evaporate from 1000 square feet of soil each day. Depending upon the size of your house, this can add up to a pretty damp environment in your crawl space.

As far as the thickness of the plastic cover, 6 mil polyethylene should be fine.