

Oh ... rats!

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Rats may disturb the insulation from between the floor joists. After the slab cures insulation must be re-installed.



Concrete is delivered into the crawl space via the easiest route – in this case, a vent opening.

Lozano describes a rat slab as a very thin layer of nonstructural concrete poured over crawlspace dirt. “Slabs seal a home from any pest that burrows. In Lamorinda this is usually Norway rats or skunks,” he says.

Animals intrude crawlspaces to nest and breed away from predators. Despite its ugly name, Lozano says the upgrade keeps water from percolating up from the soil (preventing ground-level mold and water damage) and creates a cleaner, more easily accessible underfloor environment. Lozano says project costs run between \$5-6 per square foot of crawl space —it’s a dirty, multi-day process involving hand labor in confined spaces. Workers suit up and wear respirators to limit their exposure to rodent waste.

First the site is inspected for signs of infestation (rodents, droppings, nesting material, disturbed insulation). The area is cleaned, sanitized and deodorized. Then the earth is graded if needed and outfitted with a drainage system to ensure proper drainage if a water pipe breaks.

Next, a vapor barrier is installed to protect the concrete from ground moisture. Finally, concrete is pumped through a lower vent screen and trawled by hand wall to wall for a lasting seal. Traps are set again to remove any remaining rodents.

The homeowner may notice a slight rise in indoor temperature or humidity for a day or two as the concrete cures (the new surface provides a slight bit of insulation), but it doesn’t last. Scott estimates his callback rate (for rodent activity which continues after slab work) at 3 percent. “It shouldn’t be an issue after that,” Scott says.

Kozak says she sometimes does get push back from listing agents who don’t want sellers to go through the inspection process, but she reassures them that problems can be addressed.

“Rats are a neighborhood problem,” says Woods, adding, “It’s up to each of us as residents to do what we can.”