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## **Hank Investigates: *Hank Investigates: Cracked And Crumbling***

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*It could destroy your home, or cost you hundreds of thousands in repair bills. Our investigation found an underground threat is putting billions of dollars of real estate at risk and government officials with no solid plans on how to deal with it. Hank Phillippi Ryan reveals why thousands of local homes may be cracked and crumbling.*

Floors cracking, walls splitting, and bricks deteriorating. One South Boston building is falling apart.

"So there are cracks like that all over this building?" Hank Phillippi Ryan said.

"Yes," attorney Michael Roitman said.

On lower Beacon Hill, Engineer James Lambrechts shows cracked concrete and sagging bricks that signal trouble.

"When you see this is it too late?" Phillippi Ryan said.

"It's too late," geotechnical engineer James Lambrechts said.

In the South End, one homeowner watches his building crumble.

"When you look at his what do you think?" Phillippi Ryan said.

"It scares the heck out of me," homeowner Paul Duffy said.

Across Boston, property and property values are at risk as homeowners face massive repair bills

"Do you think there are people living in houses that are in jeopardy and they don't know it?" Phillippi Ryan said.

"Absolutely," Boston Groundwater Trust Executive Director Elliott Laffer said.

You can't see the threat unless you can see underground. The foundations of almost 8,000 Boston buildings that were built on landfill are supported by wooden pilings. If that wood's not covered by protective groundwater, those structurally critical pilings can rot.

"It happens silently and unless you go and look for the problem you wont find it," Laffer said.

The only way to check is by tunneling underneath the foundation. Beneath one South End home: disaster. The pilings were badly deteriorated, and they are all that's holding up the building.

Potential trouble spots are in lower Beacon Hill, parts of the Back Bay, Chinatown, Fenway, and the South End.

Homeowner Drusa Heidle, like many of her neighbors, installed a special well to keep track of groundwater levels.

"It's a disaster in the making," Heidle said.

The only recourse is underground excavations to replace rotted pilings that are astronomically expensive and not covered by insurance.

"It's terrifying the biggest asset I have my home is at risk of being unsellable and unlivable," homeowner Peter Scott said.

So who's at fault? Owners of one South Boston building are suing the Big Dig, blaming the massive excavation. Some South-Enders say the MBTA is pumping too much out of its orange line tunnel. In fact, we obtained a utility bill revealing the T is paying tens of thousands of dollars to put water back, though it admits no blame.

"If it's not the T's fault, why are you paying?" Phillippi Ryan said.

"Because we want to be a good neighbor we want to demonstrate a good faith effort," Joe Pesaturo of the MBTA said.

Every city and state official we interviewed admits they're balancing civic responsibility with legal liability.

"People whose property is in jeopardy might say: Do something!" Phillippi Ryan said.

"We agree that government needs to do something on this issue," James Hunt, Environmental and Energy Services of the City of Boston, said.

The City of Boston is checking sewer pipes for leaks and funding groundwater research.

The state knows pumping at its Storrow Drive tunnel gets blamed for damage on Beacon Hill.

"If it turns out it's the states fault is the state going to pay?" Phillippi Ryan said.

"We are going to look to fulfill our obligations to the people and change our practices accordingly," Andrew Gottlieb, Executive Office of Commonwealth Development, said.

Now as officials 'study,' panicked homeowners measure, monitor and worry.

If groundwater keeps disappearing, so will their homes.

"It's all at risk," Scott said.

You can find out if your home or the one you're looking at buying is in a problem area by clicking on the links below.

**Boston Groundwater Trust**  
**Groundwater Emergency Task Force**