

Deck Construction and Maintenance Tips

To Keep You and Your Family Safe

FACT: Most deck accidents are preventable. They mostly occur because framing for the house lacks a secure band joist to which lag bolts are supposed to be attached. Unfortunately, it is not until after a deck collapse that most owners pay closer attention to framing details that were omitted. Here are a few tips on deck maintenance to prevent such a failure.

Hire Quality Professionals

Before hiring a deck contractor, homeowners should check references, go look at the builder's work and verify that the builder is properly licensed and insured. Also insist that the contractor secure a building permit. A building permit will ensure that the deck is inspected for proper construction and attachment to the house by the municipal building inspector. Some people view permits as a nuisance, but they are extremely important. They make sure the construction is proper and safe for you and your family.



Framing & Securing the Structure

Insist that the lag bolts securely anchor the deck ledger beam to the framing of the house. Make sure that the interface detail between the deck and the band joist is also flashed with metal or a water proof membrane to prevent water intrusion into the building. Have the builder use ring shank nails or screws in building the deck. These fasteners "bury" themselves into the decking surface and hold more securely than common nails. This will prevent annoying "nail pops" - nail heads that project up a fraction of an inch and can cause you to stumble on the deck. Speaking of stumbling, the deck and stair railing should be able to support the fall of a large, full-grown man. The balusters should be spaced no more than four inches apart to protect children from falling through.

Building Materials

Traditionally, homeowners have preferred cedar or redwood for outdoor construction like decks and fences. But in recent years, manufacturers have treated pine and other less durable woods chemically so they will survive weathering. There are other woods such as Ipe and Philippine mahogany that are also well suited for decking material that are very dimensionally stable when maintained with sealer. Composites such as Trex are also extremely popular these days for use as low maintenance decking. Remember that all deck framing material must be pressure treated wood to withstand rot and insects.

Sealing

Once the deck is installed, you need to seal it with an oil-based water-repellent sealer. There are many quality products on the market for this purpose. Sealing a wooden deck will preserve its beauty and integrity. Re-sealing should be subsequently done every year.

Proper Care and Maintenance

Once the deck is finished, owners should not overload it. Check the connections of the supportive structure annually. Maintain secure railings. If the deck moves side to side, bracing is needed below the joists to prevent lateral movement.

