



**Department of Permitting Services
Division of Building Construction
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DECK SAFETY

Maintenance on a deck, as with an automobile, should be done on a regular basis. It will keep the structure safe and enhance the longevity of the deck itself. Below is a checklist of suggestions that should be done at least once a year to minimize degradation of the deck itself and enhance your enjoyment of a well maintained deck.

- **WOOD MEMBERS**

- ✓ Visibly check the integrity of all the wood members of the deck. Use a screwdriver and try to penetrate the wood. Check decking boards, floor joists, guardrail posts, handrails, and stair stringers and treads. Use the screwdriver to probe the wood at all intersections, for example, the joists directly under the decking boards. If the wood feels soft or spongy or flakes out with the screwdriver, replace the joist.
- ✓ Check stair stringers at the ground and below the treads for rot. Replace as necessary. Any wood to wood connection point can hold water and increase degradation.
- ✓ Check support posts at grade level. This is an especially vulnerable area due to the wet to dry to wet conditions at grade level. Replace as necessary.

- **LEDGER ATTACHMENT**

- ✓ Check the ledger attachment and installation. Most catastrophic collapses happen at the ledger to house connection. Verify properly installed flashing and proper number of fasteners. If possible, check house band from the inside of the house. Look for dark stains indicating water is finding a route to the band board. Improperly installed flashing and ledger bolts can let water get to the house band board.
- ✓ If you cannot verify attachment method, a free standing deck may be in your best interest to prevent a failure. A post and beam configuration is a simple solution for a ledger connection you feel is unsafe. A permit would be required for this new installation.
- ✓ Check if a permit was issued for a hot tub or spa installed on a deck. If there isn't a permit for it's installation consider obtaining one to ensure that you can safely use the spa or hot tub.

- FASTENERS
 - ✓ Check all fasteners in the deck. Tighten all nuts and bolts and look for popping nails and drive all nails that have been raised off the surface of the deck boards.
 - ✓ Corroded fasteners and joist hangers should be replaced.

- GUARDRAILS
 - ✓ Guardrails should be tested for lateral stability. Any notched or rotted guardrail post or picket should be replaced.
 - ✓ Older decks may not meet today's standard for guardrail opening limitations, which cannot allow passage of a 4" sphere. Consider adding pickets to the guardrails so that they meet today's standard.

- STAIRS
 - ✓ Stair systems should also be thoroughly inspected to ensure safety. Check the integrity of the stair stringers. Look for cracks in the wood along the direction of the grain as this can indicate a shear failure. Look for rot under treads and at the bottom of the stringers where they contact ground. Replace stringers as necessary.
 - ✓ Any stair stringer consisting of 4 or more risers, should have a handrail mounted between 34" and 38" measured vertically from the tread nosing. Return the ends of the handrails to the guard.
 - ✓ Open risers must meet today's guardrail opening limitations. If you have open risers, consider closing them to bring into compliance.
 - ✓ If the triangle formed by the stair tread, rise, and bottom chord of the guard allows the passage of a 6" sphere, consider closing this opening to bring into compliance.

- CLEANING AND SEALING
 - ✓ Regular cleaning and sealing can not only extend the life of your deck, but make it more aesthetically pleasing. It is also essential to prevent mildew, which can create a slipping hazard. And any accumulation of leaves can rot and speed up degradation.
 - ✓ Power washing is a great way to clean a deck, but done improperly can bring out the coarse grain of wood in your deck boards, which may increase the chance of splinters. If this happens, sand the deck and then apply a coat of sealant.

Most decks last between 15 and 25 years or more, depending on environmental conditions. With regular maintenance, you can extend the life of your deck and enjoy it knowing it is as safe as possible. We hope these suggested guidelines help you with the maintenance and life of your deck. Enjoy!!

