

What's the Risk?

Outdoor Deck Safety



THE ISSUE

It is critical for homeowners to have their decks inspected to verify their structural stability and safety. Inspecting a deck for signs of rot, decay or failing components and addressing any issues makes the deck safe, improves the appearance and helps to extend its usefulness.



WHAT'S THE RISK?

Homeowners have a duty of care under the law to ensure structures on their properties (including decks and patios) are fit and safe to be used by others. Failing to ensure that your deck is safe, strong, and capable of being used without injury may be seen as negligence if the deck were to collapse.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The following list is a guide to help identify issues that impact your deck however, it does not constitute an exhaustive inspection. Homeowners should always engage the services of a qualified deck builder, or home inspector to ensure the safety of their deck.

1. Check areas of the deck including the ledger board (the board used to attach the deck to the house), support posts, floorboards, and floor joists for any signs of cracks, splits, decaying, or bowing wood. If you find damage, contact a professional for a complete inspection.
2. Look for any areas that tend to remain damp, or where water pools regularly to determine the strength of the wood. A simple way to determine the strength is to use an ice pick or small screwdriver to penetrate the surface. If you can easily insert the ice pick or screwdriver into the surface of the wood or if the wood feels spongy, it indicates decay.
3. Check for loose, rusted, or damaged fasteners including nails, screws, or anchor bolts that hold the ledger board in place. Tighten any loose fasteners or pound down nails that may have popped (if possible). Do not tighten the bolts on the ledger board if they appear to have come loose. The anchors holding the ledger board are crucial to the strength and stability of the deck and should be inspected and repaired by a qualified contractor.
4. Test the railings and the stairs. They should be strong, stable and not move or sway. Strong railings are especially important the higher the deck is elevated off the ground.
5. Clean any mold or mildew from the deck with a power washer or scrub brush and remove leaves and debris that may have accumulated near the ledger board connection. Continually removing debris from this area is a quick and simple way to extend the life of the deck.

