

Check that Deck

By Rick Bunzel

Pacific Crest Inspections

May was Deck Safety Month, according to the North American Deck and Railing Association who along with the Simpson StrongTie company, first rolled out the red carpet for deck safety in May 2006 to make sure you make sure you or you loved ones injured in a collapse.

90% of the houses here in the Pacific NW have decks. In my experience many of those have wood rot or are improperly constructed. Almost 95% of decks that are 10 years or older have some form of wood rot in them. In most cases it not apparent until you start probing the deck with a ice pick or screwdriver.



The Deck and Railing association says between August 2004 and December 2005, the U.S. news media reported 225 injuries and one fatality from deck collapses. Many more deck failures -- with and without injuries -- went unreported.

Here are seven things to look for in your deck:

- 1) Split or decaying wood: Check several areas of the deck to be sure the wood is sound. This includes the ledger board (where the deck attaches to the house), support posts and joists under the deck, deck boards, railings and stairs.
- 2) Pay special attention to areas that tend to remain damp, are regularly exposed to water or are in contact with fasteners. Use a tool - ice pick or screwdriver - to penetrate the wood surface. If you can easily penetrate .25 to .5 inch, break off a sliver of wood without splinters, or the wood is soft and spongy, decay may be present.
- 3) Ledger Board - This is the board against the home that the deck is attached to. It should have lag bolts between each joist. Nails or screws are not sufficient to hold the deck with a party of people standing on it. We also like to see flashing from the top of the ledger board going up under the siding.
- 4) Loose or corroded fasteners: Fasteners include nails, screws or anchors in the ledger board. Tighten any loose fasteners, and pound in any nails that have popped up. If a fastener appears rusted or corroded, consider replacing it. The deck or stairs should appear even without sagging and should not sway or move with tested.
- 5) Railings and banisters: Push on them to be sure there is no give. Also, check to be sure they are high enough (most codes require a 36-inch-high railing and usually encourage 42-inch high railings) with banisters no more than 4-6 inches apart to keep small children and pets from squeezing through.
- 6) Stairs: Check railings or handrails to be sure they are firmly held in place; If you have guardrails running down the staircase, be sure that the railings are no more than 4 inches apart. If the area behind the stair treads is open, this opening should be no more than 4 3/8 inches.
- 7) Moss or Algae growing on the deck. We see this in the shaded areas that don't get much traffic. Moss and Algae are forms of fungus and they are actual eating the wood. Clean away leaves and debris, since these can be slippery and promote fungus growth. If fungus is present, or the deck coating has worn away, clean with a moss away product (bleach will also work) and apply a new waterproofing coating.

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Pacific Crest Inspections. If you would like to know more about your home go to <http://www.paccrestinspections.com> If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Pacific Crest Inspections @ 360-588-6956