FORUM

# JLC Online

*One of the most popular features of our Web site is the online forum, where contractors answer one another's questions about business, computers, materials, techniques, tools, and a host of other construction-related topics. Below you'll find excerpts from "message threads" that typify the variety of issues currently being discussed.*

*If you haven't seen the forums yet, point your browser to* ***www.jlconline.com*** *and click on* ***Forums****. You're welcome to browse through the message postings — or, better yet, join in the conversation yourself.*

*— The Editors*

## MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES

## Flashing Deck Ledgers

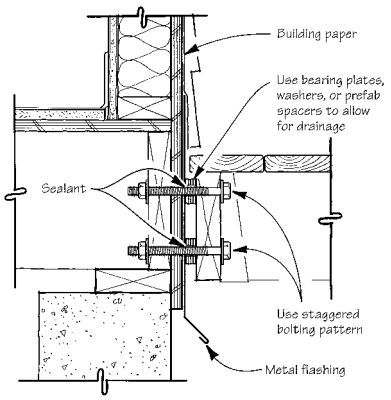
### • Posted by P.H. - January 27, 1999

*I am writing specs for reconstruction of the decks for a condo development. The existing decks are connected to the units by a 2x12 ledger that is nailed and bolted directly to the side of the unit. There is no separation between the 2x12 and the T1-11 siding. What suggestions can you offer for a retrofit that is inexpensive and easy to accomplish, and that will eliminate the dry rot at this connection. The deck surface will be removed during the retrofit, and additional deck joists will be added to the structure to accommodate new wood-polymer lumber as the deck surface. I am considering using two heavy galvanized washers on 1/2-inch bolts as a spacer between the ledger and the T1-11. Any other suggestions or designs?*

### ◦ Followup Posted by R.V.P. - January 27, 1999

If you are going to remove the siding, and I assume you will be if it has rotted, you can attach a pressure-treated ledger, over a layer of felt paper (we use #30 for this application), to the framing, then specify a custom Z-flashing over the ledger top. If you put a drip cut in the bottom of the ledger and/or tuck the siding under a rabbet in the bottom, you shouldn't have any problems.

If you are not going to remove the siding, then I would suggest using more than a couple of washers for the spacing between the ledger and the siding. [*Editor's note: See detail at right, from "Building Distinctive Decks,"* JLC *9/98.*] Too small of an area will fill with debris very quickly and collect water. I have used pressure-treated 2-by on 24-inch




A properly-flashed deck ledger protects the house rim joist from water damage. The drip-edge on the metal flashing prevents moisture from wicking into the sheathing, and the metal spacers behind the ledger allow for air circulation.

centers as spacers, then bolted the ledger through them to the wall. We bevel the tops of the blocks to drain water and we caulk, too, but keep the nailing of the blocks to a minimum.

Again, we use saturated felt between all wood connections on a deck, including on top of the joists. Seems to keep out a lot of the moisture and the inherent problems associated with that moisture.

### ◦ Followup Posted by M.S. - February 04, 1999

I agree with most respondents to your question. Rather than attempt to provide air at the connection, it should be flashed. I have done a number of these types of installations. I install GAF's ice & water shield on the sheathing first, then attach my pressure-treated ledger. A copper flashing under the T1-11 and bent over the top of the ledger will divert water over the beam (copper won't rip like aluminum does). The top of the T1-11 below the deck must also be flashed to prevent water from draining behind it.

## Underslab Water Piping

### • Posted by E.R. - January 28, 1999

*I've had an alarming number of water lines fail under concrete slabs. The lines are sleeved in continuous plastic. The water heater is electric. Most lines are main runs. Does anyone have a suggestion as to cause or fix? My thoughts tend toward grounding or dielectric unions, though I have no sound theory to back it up. The buildings are approximately 10 years old.*

### ◦ Followup Posted by M.G. - January 28, 1999

Are these incoming service water lines or supply lines? Copper, I presume? I won't use copper anywhere I can't see it anymore. Use PEX tubing. No connections under slab and no sleeves necessary in new installations. If you have used sleeved copper on your problem projects, perhaps you could withdraw the copper and slide PEX through the sleeve. With PEX you won't have to worry about any galvanic reactions.

### ◦ Followup Posted by E.R. - January 30, 1999

Thank you for your response! The water lines are flexible copper with few connections and the majority are main lines, though we just replaced a line from the utility room to the toilet. Can you elaborate on what you call the "galvanic reactions"?

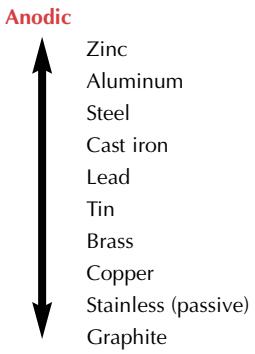
### ◦ Followup Posted by M.G. - January 31, 1999

If you mix metal supply pipes you get a reaction where one dissolves rapidly. I doubt you'll have the problem from your description.

### ◦ Followup Posted by F. - February 11, 1999

A galvanic reaction is the creation of an electrical current between two metals. This is how a battery produces electricity. "Galvanic series" charts *[included at right]* list metals in order of their electrode potential. The farther away from each other the metals are on the chart, the greater the corrosion if those two metals are in contact. If you have galvanic problems, it will be very obvious

### Galvanic Scale




This chart lists common metals by their relative position on the galvanic scale. Metals nearer to the anodic end of the scale will react with metals at the cathodic end; the farther apart the metals are on the scale, the more quickly they will corrode when put in contact with one another. (Stainless steel, though cathodic, is unreactive.)

(iron rusting is a type of galvanic reaction). The copper will look like it has rusted and there will be several leaks.

You did not describe the leaks. I assume that there was a single location for the leak. If so, I suspect that you have a mechanical problem. When concrete is poured over a copper line, the line can receive a small ding if it's hit by a piece of aggregate. This causes a small protrusion inside of the pipe. Water carries small particles, generally silt or sand, and over time, this material abrades the copper protrusion, causing a small pinhole leak. I have seen this occur several times.

## BUSINESS STRATEGIES

## Remodeling vs. New Construction

**• Posted by B.H. - January 25, 1999**

*I am interested in advice about getting started building a new home. I have been remodeling successfully for about nine years. After some long days in customers' homes, I could appreciate working in a house where no one lived. I have been approached about custom homes a couple of times before, but I was always too busy to consider it. I talked briefly with a local real estate agent, but he just plugged himself and offered no useful advice. A spec versus a custom home appeals to me at this time.*

**◦ Followup Posted by M.G. - January 28, 1999**

Have you considered buying a house that needs work, remodeling it, then selling it for a profit? It's a good way to start and build a relationship with bankers. Perhaps you could do a few and develop enough cash reserves to self-finance a spec house. A business associate of mine picks up at least one house a year to fix and roll over. He must make at least $20,000 after figuring his time and expenses. Another friend builds himself a new home every couple of years. With the new tax law changes on capital gains for home sales, he can pocket the equity tax-free if he stays in the home two years after completion. The same holds true on a spec remodel if you move into the house.

I'd go without real estate agents initially. They can help, but when they walk away making more than you do on a spec house or spec remodel, you'll gag.

## Employee or Sub?

**• Posted by J.B. - January 17, 1999**

*I am starting to venture out on my own, slowly but surely building a small, profitable remodeling company. I have a chance to be employed by a mid-sized company with a hands-on owner. I am leaning toward doing this work steady for as long as two or three years as either an independent contractor, getting paid and filing under 1099 status, or as a straight employee. I need pros and cons from both sides. Keep in mind that I'm definite about running my own company eventually. Thanks.*

**◦ Followup Posted by C.P. - January 22, 1999**

As a 1099 contractor, you will probably be paid a little more to cover your social security taxes, which you will be paying all of — no 50/50 on these. You will also have to pay for your license, bond, insurance, and all of your office expenses. You will have to file federal and state taxes, and pay for your medical & disability.

The biggest advantage is that everything is a write-off on your taxes, your free time is yours, and you have the ability to work on what you choose. You may want to check with your state; in ours, if a person works a certain

percentage of their time for one employer, they are considered an employee and the employer is responsible for matching taxes and insurance.

### ◦ Followup Posted by P.E. - January 27, 1999

I vote for subcontractor status. It will give you a taste of the discipline that is required to keep a tight set of books — good training for being an owner. It will also send a clearer signal that this is a temporary relationship, and so allow fewer chances for misunderstanding down the road. Your hourly rate as a subcontractor should probably be around 25% to 35% higher than your hourly as an employee would be.

### ◦ Followup Posted by J.E. - February 05, 1999

Go for 1099 subcontractor status. Keep in mind that the IRS frowns on "long-term" subcontract status with only one employer. You must have other jobs or sources of income and search for and bid other work. For example, working for ABC Co. on a two-year project on one site is subcontract work; but if you work on multiple sites for the same period for ABC Co., you'll be considered an employee. Sit down with a good accountant and set yourself up as an LLC for an extra layer of security.

## TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

## Positive-Placement Air Nailers

### • Posted by R.P. - February 01, 1999

*I am looking for information about "positive placement" nailers made for attaching metal connectors to wood. Any good or bad news out there? I do know that Paslode discontinued the Impulse model of their metal connector nailer, but I don't know why. Thanks for any feedback.*

### ◦ Followup Posted by M.G. - February 06, 1999

I used to orient the nose of my nailers to the holes in hangers and blast away. I don't recommend it. Curling projectiles galore, not to mention a couple nasty encounters between flesh and nail. Now I use hand nails driven with palm nailers. We tap in spikes just enough to hold them in place and go to town, one after another, with the palm nailer. It's especially useful in tight spaces where you can't swing a hammer.

### ◦ Followup Posted by R.P. - February 10, 1999

Thanks. Since that posting, I have found two suppliers of nailers for the metal connectors (both approved verbally by my Simpson Strong-Tie wholesaler). The nails are fully approved (UBC, ICBO) for the same holding power of the hand driven nails. They are full round head, heavy shank, hardened nails. *[Ed. note: The tool referred to is Paslode's 5250-PP ("positive placement") nailer (ITW Paslode; 800/682-3428), which uses ICBO-approved nails 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches in length and .131, .148, or .162 inch in diameter. A conversion kit is available to drive standard framing nails.]*

We have also used palm nailers in the past, but the project I have going now has literally hundreds of hangers, and I am concerned about the long-term effects of running those little beasts on my employees' arms and hands. I think I will go with the Paslode. It ain't cheap, but as with all good tools, hopefully it will make the job better and things better for the crew, too. Thanks again.