



# At Least You Get to Work Outside

New England sleet rattling against my office window is reminding me of the sharpest physical pain I have yet to experience. It happened while I was building a deck in the New Jersey winter. For context, you should know I've broken bones and teeth, run fingers through a tablesaw, and picked

up some colorful road rash falling from my bicycle onto a newly chipsealed road. This was worse.

All the joists were installed, and my hope was to finish nailing down the decking before the forecast ice storm hit. (Yes, that was a long time ago, when it was routine to nail down deck boards.) Unfortunately, my hope didn't beat the weather, but I was young, proud, and determined.

I kept working as a rime of ice began to glaze everything, including the joists. Eventually, of course, I slipped and fell, absorbing the entire force of the fall on my shins as they hit the top corner of a joist. No permanent damage was done and the worst of the pain dissipated within a few minutes. Still, for a time you would have seen a grown man crying.

Winter footings are another joy. It's astounding how hard it is to dig into frozen ground, and how futile it can be to try to warm it up. I've burned wood in coffee cans and left halogen lights face down on the ground. I've considered gasoline and M-80s, but good sense has always won out. In the end, I've found that building the deck on temporary supports and retrofitting footings in the spring works best. As a former boss once said, "Winter is when

you work twice as hard to get half as much done."

The Northeast's summers are hot and humid, but they're better than winter. At least there's no ice. However, there were days I'd down a gallon of water and half of a gallon of Gatorade and still be woken up in the night by a painful dehydration headache. Sunburn was another constant, as the sweat washed off the sunscreen as quickly as I applied it. The overcast days were best — except in black-fly season.

People would ask why I worked in those conditions. If you're reading this, you probably know the answer. Pride is part of it, but so is reality. The bank expects the mortgage check every month, no matter the weather. The kids need diapers, food, toys, college. The mechanic finds something wrong with the truck's suspension.

So here's the thing: I'm sure I'm not the only nut who's worked in insane conditions to pay the bills. And no doubt many of you have found smarter solutions to the problems caused by weather than I have. I'd like to start gathering material for an article on working outside in harsh conditions. Here's an opportunity to share some of the survival tips you've developed in your career and pick up some from your deck-building colleagues. Send an e-mail or a letter. Post on the forums at [www.deckmagazine.com](http://www.deckmagazine.com). We want your stories. ♦

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Engel".

Andy Engel  
Editor

Built a great deck?  
We want to see it.

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