

Why Not Use Post Connectors?



This may seem like the guardrail-post issue of *Professional Deck Builder* — there's a feature article about them (see page 42), *Question & Answer* is about them (see page 24), and this letter is about them. If you aren't familiar with post connectors, read those pieces, then come back to this.

In a nutshell, while the code itself hasn't changed, understanding and enforcement of it have. In one view, it's nearly impossible to install a code-compliant guardrail-post without using post-connection hardware. But a lot of deck builders and at least one inspector I've spoken with think this is going too far. There doesn't seem to be a rash of post failures. The ways most deck builders attach posts have met the test of time, if not the letter of the law. Where's the problem that justifies the tightening enforcement?

Here's my take on the issue. For context, you should know that I almost never support stricter laws in any area. I prefer personal responsibility over additional government. But in this case, I have to side with using the hardware. It's like seat belts — I wear mine because it's a good idea, not because it's the law.

In the first place, post connectors are pretty cheap — about \$11 per post in most cases and never more than twice that. I've installed these connectors. Often, they eliminate the need for an elaborate blocking system, so they can be faster to install than using traditional methods. And they create a bombproof attachment. Where's the downside?

From a legal liability point of view, using post connectors is smart. Should one of my railings fail, I would not want to have to defend in court why I didn't use a connector that would have ensured a code-compliant post attachment. I might as well say, "Sorry for your pain and suffering. Why don't you just take my house now? That'll save legal fees. When do you want to move in?"

Finally, from a code-enforcement standpoint, connectors make a lot of sense. I've been reading code books since the 1983 CABO 1 & 2 Family Dwelling Code. At least since then guardrails have had to withstand a 200-pound load. Yet for all that time there's been no practical and objective way to determine whether a rail post met the code's load requirement. Now an inspector can tell at a glance by the presence of a connector that a particular post can in fact resist a 200-pound load.

To my mind, the only real question is, Why wouldn't you use post connectors?

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andy Engel". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "A" and a long, horizontal line extending to the right.

Andy Engel
Editor