

LETTERS

Readers Weigh In On deck collapses

I have been building decks for approximately 20 years. I receive very few callbacks because I err on the side of overkill rather than being a budget-cutting contractor. But how many who are laid off from another job take their pickup truck and a tool belt and call themselves a deck builder? Many of them aren't even removing the vinyl siding to flash for a ledger. They build decks for cash, for 80 percent of what a legit contractor has to bid (plus receive unemployment). Are they getting permits? Do they have liability insurance? Are they purchasing \$22 hardware to fasten the ledger to the house? The answer is no. The same can probably be said of many homeowners.

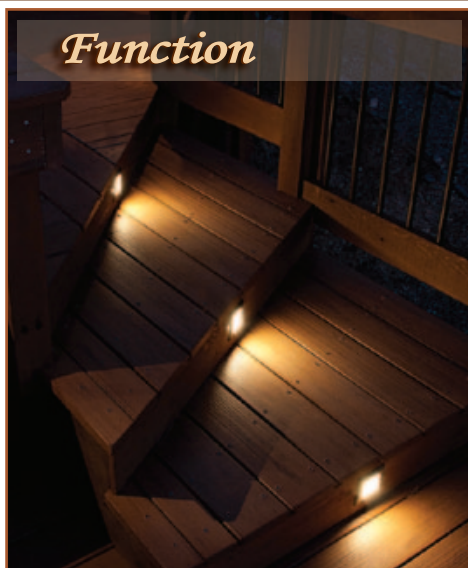
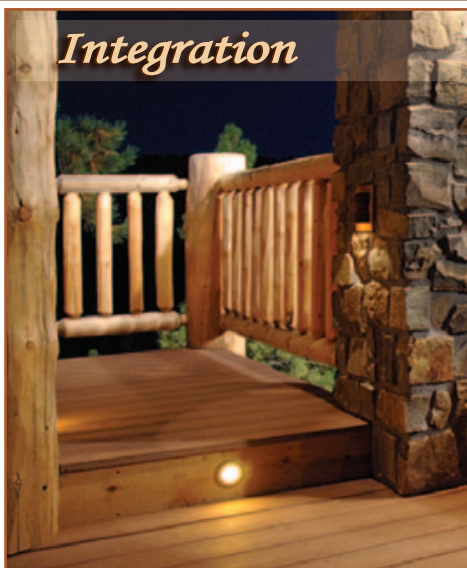
But whenever a deck collapses, the media is all over it and everyone speculates what went wrong. In reality, how many decks fail in a year's time? And how many of them were built by a professional? I think all deck collapses fall into a few categories: The deck wasn't inspected or built with a permit; a homeowner or business owner built it; or it has deteriorated so that the deck fails under load. If every deck were built with the correct-size lumber and correct-size footings, with the led-

ger lagged to the bare house rim and flashed, with rail posts blocked and bolted to the framing, and with joist hangers, we would not need the new fancy hardware that is going to become code. When it does, it will be even more difficult for professional deck contractors to compete against the DIYers and the hacks who won't bother with the hardware or even a permit.

Kevin Deckerd
Decks Limited
Via email

As owner of American Deck & Patio, I am now in my 24th year of business. As a concerned member of the deck-builder industry, as well as a remodeler and hardscaper, I have become quite alarmed at the decking industry's lack of cohesion, inability to protect itself, and recent tendency to harm itself.

We are scaring our clients away from decks. Fear-tactic marketing, staged deck collapses, "check your deck" marketing pieces with pictures of fallen decks, and misleading and questionable injury reports tell our client base to consider anything else but a deck. Whatever the good intentions may be,



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the negativity of such promotion is self-defeating.

We face unnecessary cost increases because of unnecessary codes. Some suppliers benefit by selling products, such as lateral-load brackets for joists or rail posts, that many — if not most — deck builders don't believe are needed. This increases our costs, making us less competitive than hardscaping.

Yet there lies great opportunity for the industry association and leaders to do what they were chartered to do when NADRA started, which was to protect us from costly, unwarranted intrusions such as the 2004 EPA banning of CCA and the 2009 IRC lateral-load code insertion. Proposals for the next ICC code cycle must be submitted by January 3, 2013. We need to tackle the topics that have real and immediate impact. I hope we can, before all of us deck builders are constructing more patios than decks.

Dave Lombardo
American Deck and Patio
Via email

Freestanding Decks Avoid Ledger Issues

Nothing is "impossible" unless you've never built a freestanding deck. If the ledger codes get too crazy, as suggested by Glenn Mathewson's *Structure* column (May/June 2012), simply install posts and built-up beams (girders) along the houseline. We do it all the time around cantilevered bump-outs such as bay windows. You can even drop the beams down to get your "impossible" step down to the deck for your snow-country readers.

Fredy Lowe
Driscoll Signature Decks
Via email

We want your two cents. Email us at prodeck@hanleywood.com or mail letters to: Professional Deck Builder, 186 Allen Brook Lane, Williston, VT 05495

deckmagazine.com

How do your practices and preferences stack up against those of other deck builders?

Answer our Survey and Quick Vote

November Survey

What, if any, steps do you take to increase deck safety around spas or pools?

November Quick Vote

Do your decks ever include a spa?

September/October Quick Vote Results

Do you use hidden decking fasteners?

YES - 73.44%

NO - 26.56%

Total votes - 64