

Hype or Epidemic?

The recent focus by researchers, hardware manufacturers, and the International Code Committee (ICC) on lateral load connections would suggest that the deck industry is experiencing a crisis of deck-ledger failures. I've been tracking news stories about deck collapses dating back to 1987 with various online tools, and according to my research there were 10 reported collapses in 2010, 24 in 2011, and 32 in 2012. When I compile the data contained in the stories I've been tracking, I find there have been 23 deaths and 495 serious injuries due to deck failures between 2000 to 2009.

In my opinion, a properly designed and built deck cannot be overloaded with people even if you stack them on it shoulder to shoulder. All the evidence suggests that there are two main reasons for deck failures: 1. The ledger has only been nailed onto the house, rather than being properly bolted with fasteners that are compatible with pressure-treated lumber. 2. Rot. Decks that have not been detailed correctly to prevent water damage or that have not been maintained are more susceptible to damage and weakening due to rot.

To date, I have not found a single deck that has been built to industry standards that has collapsed, with or without lateral load connections. In August 2010, I thought I might have found one in Austin, Texas, and called a number of city officials for details. Each official I talked to assured me that if this handyman had gotten a permit, this deck would not have failed, but none of them had actually investigated the incident (later, an inspector determined that the ledger board had only been screwed to the siding). Austin-area builders report that inspectors seldom closely examine the ledger connection.

Kim Katwijk
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deckmagazine.com

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

Answer our Quick Vote online

July Quick Vote

When installing joist hangers or other hardware, do you nail by hand, use a metal connector nailer, or use a palm nailer?

June Quick Vote Results

When your company builds a deck that requires new (or better) access from the interior, does your crew install the door, or do you sub out the work?

Install the door 83%

Sub out door installation 17%

Total votes 23

HEARD ON THE FORUMS (deckmagazine.com)

Fix for an Ipe Finish Mistake?

Tara: Our clients are horrified by the orange color the finish chosen by their painter gave to their new ipe decking. They want us to fix the problem by tearing the deck apart (we were the builders) and replacing it with new material. Is there an easier solution?

Sawzall316: Ipe is so dense that no finish really penetrates very much. Try pressure-washing it in an out-of-the-way spot with various nozzles ... or try sanding, or some combination of both, to see how easy it is to remove the finish. If you can't remove the stain, you could flip the boards over.

Jim Grant: Have you tried a heavy-duty wood cleaner/stripper? One with some real bite to it will remove the old coating and have the deck looking like new.

Tara: While pressure-washing and sanding turned out to be a mistake (too much contrast between the natural ipe color and the orange finish), time and natural weathering seem to be doing the trick, and the orange tint is fading to the point where the clients seem to be satisfied.

Unsafe Sawing

I hope your introductory picture I saw in the last issue of PDB ("The New Guy," May/June 2013) was just a posed picture, and not an example of how to cut a piece of material. In the photo, it appears that you have created a pinch point where the saw could kick back and could cause serious injury.

Tom Thompson
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The editor replies:

You probably can't tell from looking at that small photo, but I'm not cutting the long piece of 5/4 material. There's a shorter piece on top that's supported by an offcut, and I'm trimming a 30-degree bevel on the end of it. Of course, the picture is staged — I'd already cut the bevel when the photo was taken. But thanks for your note about safety — it's an important subject for both experienced and inexperienced builders. Maybe it's time for another PDB article on it.

We want your two cents.

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