

Likes Lumberyards

What's the difference between a lumberyard and a home center? A lumberyard doesn't have aisles of plumbing supplies, carpet displays, and electrical apparatus to overwhelm you while you are only looking for lumber. It may carry accessories, such as nails, screws, brackets, saws, and drills, that are used with lumber but it mainly concentrates on selling different species, grades, lengths, widths, and thicknesses of lumber. You can usually find a lumberyard by looking for one the following words in its name: yard, millworks, woodworks, boards, or sawmill.

Speaking of sawmills, lumberyards have in-house saws that can cut, rip, bevel, or trim boards to order. Yet another sign of a lumberyard is its atmosphere. It is not air-conditioned or heated in its storage areas, so it's hot in the summer, and cold in the winter. Usually there is sawdust lying around, so it smells like lumber too.

The guys who work in lumberyards don't say things like "May I help you, sir?" Rather, they say things like "Whatcha got,

pal?" when you drive into their yard. They also look like they used to be—or still are—carpenters. They wear Levis, flannel shirts, and work boots, and when they speak they use terms like posts, columns, beams, joists, studs, and rafters, and actually know what they mean. And they don't have to tell you, when you are in the middle of a job, "We can get that size for you in two weeks, or you can go to another one of our outlets on the other side of the county."

So, if you find yourself needing a good cross section of wood to build a porch, shed, barn, deck, or garage, do yourself a favor and look for a lumberyard.

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Rx for Deck Safety

When a deck fails, we often learn it was 20, 30, or sometimes 40 years old and fastened to the house with a few rusted nails. For despite our efforts to upgrade new deck construction, the codes contain few provisions that reach back to existing structures.

Some would argue both the IRC and the current Property Maintenance Code decree that all buildings (including decks) must be maintained in good repair. While these code citations are on the target, in the real world of municipal finance, most cities and towns just can't pay for a full-fledged property inspection program.

If the defective deck happens to be in the front or side yard, an inspector may see it during a routine drive through a neighborhood. But, unlike spotting a

roofing or framing job, a detailed inspection of an older deck usually involves an up-close and personal look. Besides, more often than not, for privacy, homeowners place the structure behind the house.

Given this state of affairs, just how and where would an inspector begin a deck inspection program? He or she does not merely flip through a street listing book, stop on a random page, and say, "I'll start here." So, how can we inspect these drive-a-couple-of-spikes-so-we-can-get-paid structures in a timely manner?

Maybe there is a way. In my home state of Massachusetts, we have two models: the Title 5 Septic Upgrade and the Smoke Detector Regulation. Whenever a home is resold, its septic system must pass an inspection by the local board of health, and the fire department tests the smoke

detectors. The contribution of these two laws to health and safety jump out and grab you.

Why not adopt a similar law for the egress systems of an existing home, to include the exits, stairways, and decks? These three are also at the top of any safety hierarchy.

We now apply a robust standard to the construction of new decks. To begin the systematic replacement of the older catastrophes-in-waiting, states should legislate the upgrade of the deck and exit systems upon the sale of existing homes. ♦

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