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SAFE HARBOR NEWSLETTER

Deck Construction & Safety: Building a Strong, Safe Outdoor Space

Summer is the perfect time to enjoy the outdoors, and what better way to do that than with a beautiful, sturdy deck? Whether you're planning to build a new deck or refresh an existing one, safety should always be your top priority. In this month's newsletter, we'll discuss the key aspects of **deck construction** and **safety considerations** to ensure your outdoor space is both functional and secure.

Building a Strong Foundation: The Basics of Deck Construction

A well-built deck not only enhances the beauty of your home, but it also provides a safe environment for gatherings, relaxation, and outdoor activities. Here's what you need to know before starting your project:

1. Choose the Right Materials

The materials you choose for your deck will play a major role in its durability and safety. The two most common options are:

- **Pressure-treated wood**: Affordable and widely used, pressure-treated wood is resistant to rot, decay, and insects but will need regular maintenance like sealing and staining.
- **Composite decking**: Made from a mix of wood fibers and plastic, composite decks require less maintenance and are highly resistant to rot and fading.

Whichever material you choose, make sure it's rated for outdoor use and capable of withstanding the elements in your region.

2. Proper Planning & Design

Before construction begins, ensure your deck is designed to fit the intended use and local building codes. Considerations include:

- **Size & shape**: Think about how many people you want to accommodate and the type of furniture or features (like a hot tub or grill) you'll have on the deck.
- **Elevation**: If your deck is elevated more than a few feet off the ground, you may need additional support to keep it stable and safe.
- **Access**: Make sure there's proper access to the deck from your home, and consider adding stairs or ramps for ease of entry.

3. Hire a Professional (If Necessary)

Deck construction requires more than just basic carpentry skills. It's essential that the structure is properly anchored and supports the weight of people and furniture. If you're unsure about the design or if you're building an elevated deck, it's always best to consult or hire a licensed contractor.

Deck Safety: Protecting Your Family and Friends

Once your deck is constructed, safety becomes the primary focus. A few key safety issues should always be on your radar:

1. Ensure Proper Structural Support

The foundation of your deck is crucial for its stability. It must be built on solid concrete footings, and the frame should be properly braced. The proper attaching hardware is required to connect the framing components to each other as well as to the house. Use treated lumber and high-quality hardware and always ensure your deck can support the expected weight load, including furniture, people, and accessories.

2. Railings & Balusters: Don't Skip These Safety Features

If your deck is elevated, **railings** are a must. The railing height should meet local code requirements—typically between 36 and 42 inches. Additionally:

- **Balusters** (the vertical posts between the rails) should be spaced no more than 4 inches apart to prevent children from slipping through.
- Ensure that railings are securely attached and can withstand the force of leaning or pushing.

3. Anti-Slip Surfaces

Decks can get slippery when wet, increasing the risk of falls. To prevent accidents:

- Choose decking materials with anti-slip properties or consider adding slip-resistant coatings.
- Make sure to maintain the deck's surface by cleaning it regularly and addressing any issues like moss or algae growth.

4. Electrical & Fire Safety

Outdoor lighting and electrical installations should be done by a licensed electrician. Ensure all wiring is rated for outdoor use and is installed in compliance with local codes. Also, avoid placing grills or fire pits too close to the deck to minimize fire hazards.

5. Regular Maintenance & Inspections

Your deck will last longer and stay safer if it's properly maintained. Here's what to do:

- **Inspect annually** for signs of rot, loose boards, or rusty fasteners.
- **Seal or stain** wooden decks every couple of years to protect against water damage and UV rays.
- **Clean regularly** to remove dirt, leaves, or mold, especially in high-moisture areas.

Common Deck Hazards to Watch Out For

While decks are generally safe, there are a few hazards to be aware of:

- **Missing attaching hardware:** Lag bolts attach the structure to the house, ensuring a solid connection as this is where decks most commonly fail. Joist hangers and strapping attach all of the framing components to each other which makes the deck significantly stronger than one only built with nails/screws.
- **Rot**: Wooden decks are susceptible to moisture damage. Always inspect for areas that may have become weak or unstable due to rot.
- **Loose Railings**: Over time, the bolts or screws that secure railings can loosen, making them unsafe. Tighten and inspect them regularly.
- **Worn Nails or Screws**: Nails or screws can work their way loose, leaving sharp edges that could cause injury. Ensure everything is properly fastened and replace damaged hardware.

Conclusion: Building a Safe, Beautiful Deck

A deck is a wonderful addition to any home, offering a place to relax, entertain, and enjoy the outdoors. But like any structure, it requires thoughtful design, quality materials, and regular upkeep to ensure its safety.

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Before you break out the tools or hire a contractor, take the time to plan properly, choose durable materials, and make sure your deck complies with safety standards. And once it's built, don’t forget to perform regular maintenance to keep it looking great and safe for years to come.

Need Help?
If you’re ready to build your dream deck, or if you need assistance with safety inspections or repairs, we’re here to help! Reach out to Safe Harbor for expert advice, design, and construction.

Stay safe, enjoy the outdoors,

The Safe Harbor Team