



RESIDENTIAL DECK SAFETY

Residential Deck Safety Tips

A properly constructed and maintained deck can provide a great place to enjoy many hours of outdoor leisure time. A poorly constructed and/or maintained deck can cause bruises, sprains and fractures or worse.

Deck failures are becoming more frequent in the U.S. due to aging structural materials on older decks, excessive loading (such as hot tub placement with inadequate structural support) and as a result of improper deck construction methods. A web search of “residential deck failures” will show you prime examples of what can go wrong with a deck. Thankfully, this same search will yield a wealth of information about code-compliant deck design and installation as well as maintenance recommendations.

If you have an existing deck, check for loose, corroded or missing connections. Inspect metal connector plates and joist hangers, screws, nails and bolts. Look at all locations where lumber components of the deck are connected to something – joist to house, joist to beam, beam to post and post to footing. Also check for significantly cracked or rotten wood, loose deck boards, loose or improperly spaced fall protection (guards and rails), missing or hard-to-grasp handrails and improperly built stairs.

If you are planning to reconstruct or alter an existing deck or build a new one, here are some important requirements:

- Current wood preservatives are generally less toxic but more corrosive than preservatives used when chemically decay-resistant lumber was first introduced. Aluminum flashing between the house and deck and lightly galvanized steel connectors can become badly corroded in just a few months. Ask your lumber and hardware supplier to verify compatibility of materials or use stainless steel connectors and corrosion resistant flashing.
- Where no portion of a deck is greater than 30 inches above the surrounding ground surface, fall protection is not required; however, installation of guards and rails is still recommended.
- A construction permit is not required when a deck will be self-supporting (not attached to the house) and will have no portion greater than 30 inches above the surrounding ground surface; however, a zoning permit is required for all new decks and deck enlargements.
- A zoning permit is required to verify that the deck does not exceed allowable encroachment into required yards (too close to a property line). If the deck construction will not allow precipitation to pass through and soak into the ground, we also verify that the deck area will not cause property improvements to exceed the allowable limit of impervious lot coverage.
- A construction permit is required for new decks (except as noted above), structural repairs, additions and alterations to required safety components. You will need to submit stair, rail and guard details, framing and load path connection plan, materials list, cost estimate and site plan.

You can download a General Permit Application and a code compliance checklist for decks on the Township website (<http://www.adamscounty.us/Munic/MtPleasantTwp/Pages/DocumentsForms.aspx>). If you need assistance with the completion of these forms or have any questions regarding deck requirements, please contact the codes enforcement staff at (717) 624-8049.