

5 Steps to a Safer and Stronger Deck

Decks

What you need to know to make your deck strong and safe.

Most experts agree that the average life expectancy of a wood deck is 10 to 15 years. There are millions of decks in the U.S. that are beyond their useful life and may be unsafe. In the past five years, there have been nearly 350 reported injuries and 17 deaths as a result of deck failures.

As you evaluate the safety and construction of your new or existing deck, knowing these simple steps will help to ensure your deck is structurally sound and properly maintained. We've included a list of warning signs, so you'll know what to keep an eye out for on your deck.

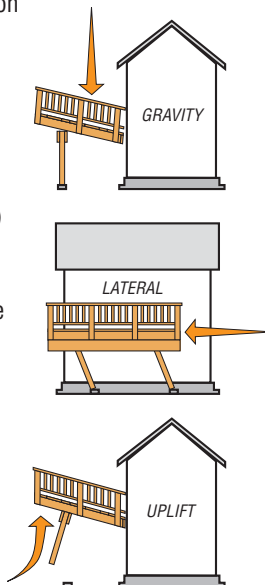
1. Check Out Your Deck

The first step in making your deck safe is knowing that it may not be. Decks are potentially the most dangerous part of the house, according to some experts. Factors, such as improper construction, exposure to the elements and lack of maintenance can make your deck unsafe. It's important to look for the warning signs: missing or loose connections, corrosion, rot and cracks. If you are unsure about the safety of your deck, consult with a professional such as a structural engineer or contractor.

2. Carry the Weight

For most homeowners, the deck is a popular gathering place for friends and family. Like a house, a deck must be designed to support the weight of people and objects placed on it as well as the forces of Mother Nature like wind, snow and earthquakes. Knowing how weight and other forces can affect the safety of your deck is important. There are three types of forces that put pressure on your deck, causing strain to the critical connections that keep it together:

- Gravity – downward pressure typically caused from people standing on the deck or snow and ice.
- Lateral – a back and forth (horizontal) motion caused by people walking on the deck and/or leaning on a railing. Wind and earthquakes can also create lateral movement.
- Uplift – wind flows under the deck creating a lifting effect. People standing on the overhang of the deck also creates upward pressure on the connection that attaches the deck to the adjacent support structure (typically your home).



3. Create a Path

A continuous load path, that is. A continuous load path is a method of construction that creates a series of solid connections within the structure of the deck that transfers load through its frame to the ground and adjacent support structure (commonly your home). If your deck is built with a continuous load path, it will be better equipped to resist the forces that can weaken your deck.

4. Combat Corrosion

Decks and the metal connectors that keep them connected and safe are exposed to the elements. Over time, metal connectors, screws and nails can corrode and weaken the structure of your deck, especially if the right product is not used. If you live in an area prone to moisture, such as along the coast or near bodies of water, the risk of corrosion is much higher. Chemicals in pressure-treated woods and other corrosive elements can also damage your deck. Using connectors, screws and nails that are made from stainless steel is the best way to combat corrosion. When choosing connectors, take into account where you live and how weather and the environment may affect your deck. For critical information about corrosion and connector selection, visit www.strongtie.com/safedeck.

5. Maintain a Safe Deck

Just like other parts of your home, regular maintenance and inspection are required. To prolong the life of your deck, you need to check for things like loose boards or protruding nails. You should also keep your deck clean from debris and depending on the type of deck boards used, keep them sealed to protect against water and sun damage.



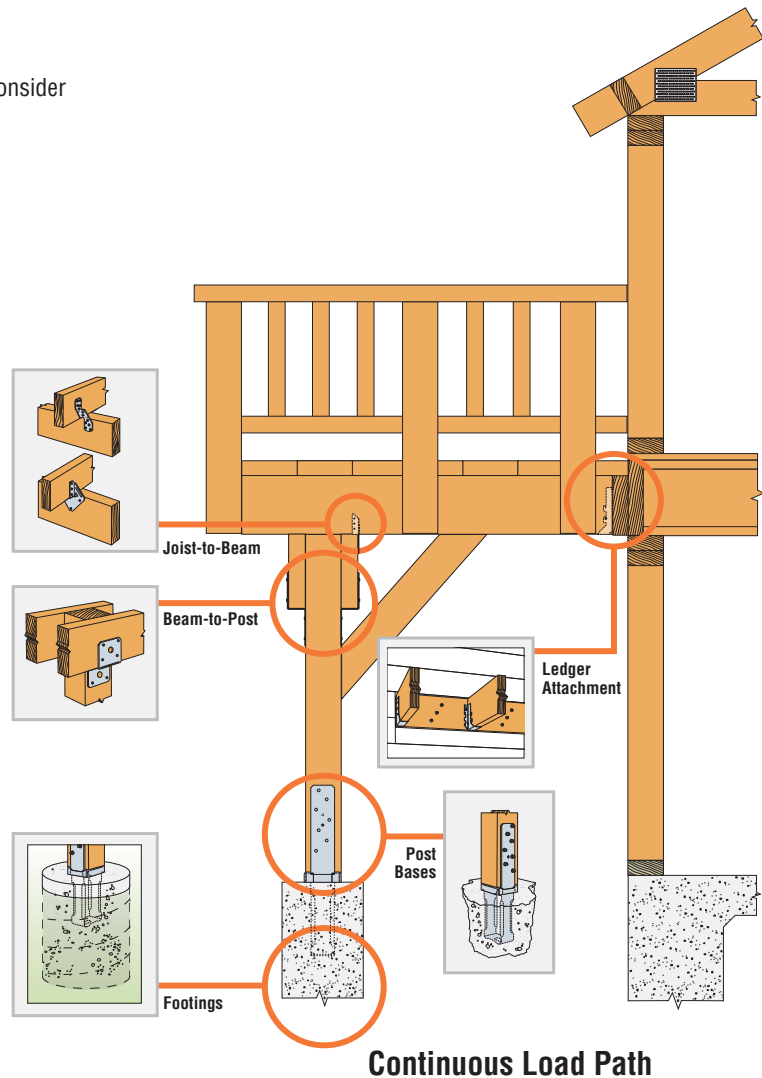
Is Your Deck Unsafe? Look for the 5 Warning Signs

Decks

What you need to know to make your deck strong and safe.

If you see any of these warning signs you should consider repairing, retrofitting or rebuilding your deck.

- 1. Missing Connections:** A deck should be built using a series of wood members, nails, screws and metal connectors to create a continuous load path. Look at how your deck is built—if all you see is nails, your deck may be unsafe.
- 2. Loose Connections:** Depending on how the deck was built, vital connections may have degraded over time due to various factors. Issues such as wobbly railings, loose stairs and ledgers that appear to be pulling away from the home are all causes for concern.
- 3. Corrosion of Connectors and Fasteners:** Metal connectors, nails and screws can corrode over time. Look for rust and other signs of corrosion that can weaken the structure of your deck.
- 4. Rot:** Wood can rot and degrade over time with exposure to the elements. Wood members within the deck frame that have rotted may no longer be able to perform the function for which they were installed, making your deck unstable.
- 5. Cracks:** As wood ages, it is common for cracks to develop. Large cracks or excessive cracking overall can weaken your deck.



Repairing or Retrofitting an Existing Deck

If you've determined your deck is unsafe, you'll need to either repair or retrofit it or in some cases, rebuild it altogether. If rebuilding your deck is not feasible, there are improvements you can do on your own to strengthen your deck. However, some cases may require the professional services of an engineer and contractor. Knowing what products and tools

are needed from the beginning will set you on the right course to safety. Remember, when hiring a professional, be sure they are licensed and have a good reputation. Once the work is done, don't forget about your deck—it needs to be checked and inspected on a regular basis.

Simpson Strong-Tie has developed a comprehensive, easy-to-understand Deck Framing Connection Guide to help you through the process of making your deck safe, secure and code compliant. You can download the guide or request a copy at www.strongtie.com/safedeck.