



Spring Safety Checklist for Your Decks #6

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In the home stretch! This is the final article in the deck safety series – we’ll complete our inspection and you’ll be a deck safety expert! This month is “Deck Safety Month” so the time is right to get everything shipshape and ready for summertime. Last week we started up on to your deck via the stairs (if you have them) and you checked them out for looseness, and falling and tripping hazards. Now we’re on your deck and looking at the railings and posts.

As you did with the stair rails, hold of the top railing and try to move it. It should be strong and secure, and not move against your weight. If it moves, it could mean that connections are loosening up and should be tightened or reinforced. Remember we said that railings should be able to withstand a force at the top of 200 pounds in any direction. Also, all decks that are over 30 inches above the ground should have guardrails.

Now look between the horizontal rails at the small posts filling in that space – we call this “infill”. Is the spacing of the pickets, or vertical posts that keep children from falling through this area, 4 inches or less? You should also look at the space between the bottom rail and the deck. This space should be no more than 6 inches. This standard is relatively recent, so your home may not have this spacing. That’s ok. But when you replace your deck components, or make improvements, you should move to the new spacing for additional safety.

Now look at the surface condition of your deck. Is it worn? Are there nails sticking up? Splinters? Take a small screwdriver or awl and poke at the areas that look damaged or soft. If the blade of the screwdriver easily penetrates the wood, or the wood easily flakes off, then you have rot damage. These sections should be replaced because they have lost their strength. Look at the planking you walk on. Are there any big knotholes that could catch a shoe heel (ok, I

know we don't wear high heels in the mountains, thank goodness, but you never know when Lady Gaga or Jennifer Anniston will visit you).

If you have pressure treated wood on your deck rather than a composite (such as Trex) you'll want to seal it regularly so it lasts longer and looks good. As you may already know, this is no small task. If you do not mind a solid color, painting your deck will give you longer intervals between treatments.

You're done! Congratulations! But wait. Now that you have your "list", what are you going to do? If you've got multiple "repair" items on your list, you are in the majority, not the minority, of homeowners.

The good news is that most deck repairs, with the possible exception of inadequate or failing footers, are straightforward and not overly expensive unless you are replacing major sections of structure. More often, a good contractor can repair your deck with a minimum of time and money. Many of the items we've explored in this series are easy to do yourself – like adding or replacing hangers.

Now that you're the expert, inspect your deck at least every spring, and keep a good sealer or a good paint on the surfaces. This will stretch out the time between component replacements and ensure ongoing safety and enjoyment.