McClurg

7-Point Deck Safety Inspection Checklist

1. How Your Deck is Attached to the House

- Your deck should be bolted with properly sized and spaced bolts to the structure, not just nailed.
- The National Association of Certified Home Inspectors (NACHI) notes that 90 percent of deck collapses occur as a result of separation of the deck ledger board from the house.
- **Check** for loose or missing bolts and for missing nails and screws.
- **Check** for corrosion to the bolts or deterioration of the wood surrounding the bolts.

2. Flashing

- Is there flashing between your deck and your house?
- There should be some type of membrane or metal flashing between your deck and your house to prevent water from doing damage to your home.
- **Check** under your deck for flashing to see if it's still in place.
- **Check** for signs of water damage where the deck meets the home.

3. Deck Foundation

- The size of the foundation will depend on the size of the deck and condition of your soil.
- Deck posts should be 48 inches into the ground, below the frost line to be resistant to movement and shifting.
- If concrete piers were used for setting posts they can range from 6 inches in diameter to 36 inches in diameter, depending on the size of the deck they are supporting.
- **Check** the posts to be sure they fit solidly into the piers. Posts should be secured with galvanized metal connectors or poured into the concrete. Be sure the connectors are in good condition and are not rusting.

4. Structural Framing and Fasteners

- The main structural framing members of a deck are support posts, beams and floor joists. These framing members are typically connected with bolts or galvanized metal hangers where posts meet beam and beams meet joist.
- There are different types of metal hangers that should be used where structural members meet and they should be installed with specific types of nails.
- **Check** nails and fasteners for signs of weakness and corrosion.

5. Split and Rotting Wood

- Wood will crack and rot over time.
- **Check** for large splits. Use a screwdriver or awl to check boards for rot or weakness.
- **Check** the ledger boards, posts, joists and decking.
- Some types of wood are not compatible with some types of metal and can cause the metal to corrode. Again, **check** for rust on fasteners or metal hangers.

6. Railings

- According to the North American Deck and Railing Association (NADRA), deck railings should be at least 36 inches high for safety.
- Spaces between the balusters (spindles) should be less than 4 inches to prevent children and pets from getting thorough the rail or becoming caught in the gaps.
- **Check** railings and balusters to make sure they are not loose.
- **Check** handrails to make sure they don't wobble. They should be able to support the weight of a 200-pound person.

7. Stairs

- **Check** deck stairs for signs of rot and cracks on stringers, risers and treads.
- **Check** treads to be sure they are not loose or uneven.