

SimpleSide Construction OBX Issues Coastal Deck Design Guidance

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SimpleSide Construction OBX has issued guidance for coastal property owners following the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 2026 Atlantic hurricane season outlook, released May 21, which forecasts a below-normal season of eight to fourteen named storms as El Niño conditions develop across the Pacific basin. The guidance addresses a pattern the company has observed among property owners who advance or postpone construction plans in response to seasonal forecast activity.

NOAA has stated that its seasonal outlook describes overall basin activity based on large-scale weather and climate patterns and is not a landfall forecast. National Weather Service Director Ken Graham noted at the time of release that reviewing preparedness plans remains essential, because a single storm can define a season. The agency has also noted competing factors in the 2026 outlook, with El Niño conditions tending to suppress storm formation while warmer than normal ocean temperatures and weaker trade winds support activity.

The design requirements that govern a coastal deck are assigned to a specific parcel rather than to a season. Wind speed zone, exposure category and flood zone designation are determined by a property's location and applied by the local building department at permit review. Those designations do not change from year to year in response to forecast activity, and a structure designed to satisfy them is answering conditions established well before any given season begins.

Federal guidance reflects the same principle. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program Technical Bulletin 8, which addresses corrosion protection for metal connectors and fasteners in coastal areas, identifies stainless steel and thicker hot-dip galvanized connectors as improving corrosion resistance, recommends that connectors and fasteners be of the same metal, and emphasizes routine inspection regardless of which metal is selected. The bulletin also notes that preservative-treated lumber requires particular attention in fastener selection. FEMA publishes additional coastal construction material through its Coastal Construction Manual and its Home Builder's Guide to Coastal Construction technical fact sheet series, which includes a fact sheet devoted specifically to coastal building materials.

Material selection for structural components follows published standards rather than seasonal conditions. The American Wood Protection Association maintains a Use Category System that sorts preserved wood products into categories based on exposure and product performance, with preservative retention and penetration levels tied to each category. The association directs specifiers to confirm both the use category and the retention level listed on the treatment certification, and treating plants are inspected and certified by third-party quality assurance agencies. These designations are set by service conditions such as ground contact, above-ground exposure and proximity to salt water, none of which vary with a seasonal forecast.

"The forecast tells a property owner something about the season, not about the structure," said Grant Smith, Owner and Founder of SimpleSide Construction OBX. "The wind zone and flood zone assigned to a lot are the same in a quiet year as in an active one, and those are what the design has to answer to."

Timing decisions carry practical consequences apart from engineering ones. Design consultation, permit review and inspection scheduling each require lead time, and compressing them narrows the window available for design revisions before construction begins. Property owners who defer planning until later in the season may also encounter reduced scheduling availability across the trades, as work concentrates into a shorter period.

Existing structures present a separate consideration. A deck that was compliant when it was built may not reflect the requirements that apply to new work on the same parcel today, and condition assessment addresses factors that accumulate over years rather than over a single season. Fastener corrosion, connection movement and moisture intrusion develop gradually in a salt air environment, and their progression is a function of elapsed exposure rather than of any one storm.

SimpleSide Construction OBX assesses existing structures on age, current condition and compliance with the requirements applicable to the property rather than on annual storm projections. Requirements vary by jurisdiction and by project scope, and the company directs property owners to their local building department for determinations specific to a parcel. Grant Smith holds a bachelor of science in civil engineering from Old Dominion University and worked as a project engineer in commercial construction before founding the company.

"Condition and exposure history tell us more about a deck than any forecast will," Smith said. "What we look at is how long a structure has been standing in a salt environment and how detailed it was when it went up."

The company's process begins with an on-site consultation and a custom three-dimensional rendering, which allows design decisions to be reviewed against the actual property before construction begins.

SimpleSide Construction OBX is a construction company serving Dare and Currituck counties in North Carolina. The company provides custom deck design and construction in composite, PVC and wood decking, along with deck repair, railings, deck lighting, pergolas, porches, siding installation, window and door replacement, and outdoor living construction for residential and commercial properties.

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For more information about Simpleside Construction OBX, contact the company here:Simpleside Construction OBXGrant Smith+12526453421simpleconstruction@gmail.com2407 N Croatan Hwy Suite A, Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948, United States

Simpleside Construction OBX

SimpleSide Construction OBX is a family-owned, locally-owned coastal construction company serving the Outer Banks since 2015. Founded by Grant Smith, a Civil Engineering graduate of Old Dominion, the team specializes in custom deck building

Website: http://www.simplesideobx.com/

Email: simpleconstruction@gmail.com

Phone: +12526453421