

Outdoor Space Builders Addresses Drought Effects on Deck Footings

September 02, 2026

OXFORD, CT - September 02, 2026 -

Outdoor Space Builders has issued guidance on how extended dry conditions affect the footings and framing beneath residential decks, following the Stage 2 Drought Advisory that Governor Ned Lamont declared for New Haven, Fairfield and Middlesex counties on June 10, 2026.

The advisory is the second of five levels under the Connecticut Drought Preparedness and Response Plan. State officials cited significantly low streamflow across the region, a lack of rain and increased wildfire danger when the designation was issued. The advisory was accompanied by a request for voluntary reductions in water use rather than mandatory restrictions.

Conditions deepened through the following weeks. By early July, the U.S. Drought Monitor placed the substantial majority of Connecticut under drought designation, with most of the affected area classified as moderate and a smaller portion classified as severe. Rainfall later in the month eased conditions across much of the state, though a significant share of Connecticut remained either in drought or classified as abnormally dry.

Ground conditions across the state vary considerably from one property to the next. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the largest share of Connecticut soils formed on glacial till and generally carry sandy loam textures, with drainage ranging from somewhat excessively drained to very poorly drained. Stoniness, shallow depth to bedrock and slope are described as the most common limitations. A second large share of the state consists of basal till containing a compact hardpan within a few feet of the surface.

The United States Geological Survey describes the unconsolidated deposits overlying bedrock in Connecticut as ranging from a few feet to several hundred feet in thickness. Till, the most widespread of those deposits, was laid down directly by glacial ice and consists of an unsorted mixture of sand, silt and clay with variable amounts of stones and large boulders.

"Two properties on the same road can sit on completely different ground," said Joe Mastersanti, Co-Owner of Outdoor Space Builders. "One has a few feet of till over ledge and the other has depth to work with. That difference decides how we set the foundation, and it matters more after a long dry stretch than most homeowners expect."

The foundation method is selected against those conditions rather than applied uniformly across projects. The company installs both helical piers and traditional concrete footings, choosing between them based on soil type, grade and the load the finished structure will carry. Helical piers are advanced past shallow surface layers to bear on more stable material below. Concrete footings placed below the local frost depth resist movement through mass and bearing area.

Frost depth requirements in Connecticut are set at the municipal level, and permits for residential deck construction are issued by each town's building department rather than by a statewide authority. Inspection sequences also vary by town, though the process commonly includes an inspection of footings before they are covered and a final inspection once construction is complete.

Framing material responds to moisture change in the surrounding environment as well as to conditions in the ground. Wood gains and loses moisture with ambient humidity, and that movement can affect how connections perform across the life of a structure. Steel, aluminum and composite framing are less responsive to those changes. Outdoor Space Builders builds in all four framing materials and is a Fortress Preferred Member, a designation issued by a manufacturer of steel deck framing systems.

Decking surface material factors into the same considerations. The company installs composite and PVC boards, which do not require the staining and sealing schedule that exposed wood surfaces need. Composite boards combine wood fiber and plastic, while PVC contains no wood content.

Mastersanti said homeowners planning construction during or after a dry period benefit from a site evaluation that considers soil type, drainage and grade before design work begins. The company's process includes a design consultation, three-dimensional renderings, permit acquisition and site preparation ahead of foundation and framing work, followed by construction and a final inspection and walkthrough.

Property owners with existing structures face a related consideration. Ground that has dried through an extended period will take on moisture again when normal rainfall returns, and that cycle affects material at and below grade differently depending on what the original construction used and how deeply it was set.

Outdoor Space Builders is a family-owned deck and outdoor living contractor founded in January 2018 and based in Oxford, Connecticut. The company serves communities across New Haven County using in-house crews rather than subcontracted labor, and builds decks, porches, patios, pergolas and related outdoor structures. It holds TimberTech Platinum Pro, DeckStars Certified Pro and Fortress Preferred Member designations, and placed third in the 2025 NADRA National Deck Competition.

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