Cedarbrook Deck & Patio Addresses Drought Impact on Footing Stability

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MT AIRY, MD - September 02, 2026 -
Cedarbrook Deck & Patio is advising Maryland homeowners to watch for signs of ground movement beneath decks, porches and patios following months of drought across the state. The company, which builds outdoor living structures in central Maryland, reports that seasonal soil movement is among the more common causes of changes homeowners notice in structures that were built correctly and have performed well for years.

The U.S. Drought Monitor recorded roughly 71 percent of Maryland in drought as of mid-July 2026, with severe conditions across the central portion of the state. Federal drought impact reporting for the period covering mid-June through mid-July documented agricultural effects in Frederick County, one of the two counties that meet at Mount Airy. Conditions across the Mid-Atlantic ran warmer than normal through the spring, and dry weather persisted into the summer months.

Prolonged dry weather draws moisture out of the ground. Clay-heavy Piedmont soils, common across the Frederick and Carroll County area, lose volume as they dry. That volume change can transfer into the footings and posts carrying an outdoor structure, and the effect is gradual enough that it usually goes unnoticed while it is happening.

Recovery is rarely uniform. When rainfall returns, soil takes on moisture at different rates depending on drainage, slope, shade, and what sits above it. A yard can absorb water quickly in one corner and slowly in another, and ground that has been through a full dry cycle does not always return to precisely where it started.

Homeowners typically notice the result before they notice the cause. A gate that no longer latches cleanly, a railing slightly out of plumb, a patio joint that has opened, or a section of decking that has developed a low spot are all worth a closer look after a dry season. So is a set of stairs that feels different underfoot than it did

in the spring.

"People assume something has gone wrong with the deck itself," said Mike Arneson Jr., Owner and President of Cedarbrook Deck & Patio. "Often the deck is doing exactly what it was built to do, and the ground underneath it has changed. That is a different problem with a different answer, and it is worth knowing which one is in front of you before spending money on the wrong fix."

Arneson holds a deck evaluation and inspection certification through the North American Deck and Railing Association, a credential covering the assessment of existing structures rather than new construction alone.

The foundation method plays into how a structure responds to seasonal ground movement. Cedarbrook builds on helical piers, Diamond Piers and traditional concrete footings, and the selection depends on conditions at the individual site rather than on a standard approach applied everywhere. Slope, drainage, depth to rock and the composition of the soil itself all factor into that decision at the design stage.

Ground conditions in the Piedmont region can vary considerably across short distances. A single property can contain more than one soil type, and the difference between two lots on the same street is often greater than homeowners expect.

"Two houses a few doors apart can sit on noticeably different ground," Arneson said. "That is not unusual here. It is the reason a method that works well on one site is not automatically the right call on the next one, and it is why the site assessment matters more than most people realize."

The company suggests that homeowners with structures more than a few years old walk the perimeter after an extended dry stretch. Gaps that have opened at the base of posts, changes in how doors and gates operate, settling visible at the bottom of stairs, and separation where a patio meets a walkway are all straightforward to spot without special equipment.

Timing carries some weight as well. Ground that has been through a dry summer heads into the autumn and winter months, when moisture returns and temperatures cycle above and below freezing. Movement that began during a drought does not necessarily stop when the rain does, which is one reason late summer is a practical point in the year to take stock of an existing structure.

Publicly available data can help homeowners understand their own property. The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service publishes soil survey information by address through its Web Soil Survey, including drainage characteristics and shrink-swell potential for specific soil series. The service is free and covers the Mount Airy area in detail.

Cedarbrook Deck & Patio is a family-owned design and build firm founded in 2006, serving homeowners in Frederick, Carroll, Howard, Montgomery and Washington counties in central Maryland. The company designs and builds decks, porches, patios and related outdoor living structures.

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Cedarbrook Deck & Patio

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