

Rosebud Decks & Porches Issues Guidance on Deck Connections Before Winter

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Rosebud Decks & Porches has issued inspection guidance for homeowners on deck structural connections, citing a long-term warming trend in Minnesota winters that increases the number of freeze-thaw cycles a structure undergoes each season.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources State Climatology Office reports that winter is the state's fastest-warming season, with average winter temperatures rising more than those of other seasons across recent decades. The company said the practical consequence for outdoor structures runs counter to what many homeowners assume.

"People think a mild winter is easier on a deck. It is often the opposite," said Joseph Becker, owner of Rosebud Decks & Porches. "A winter that stays frozen from December through March puts a structure through one long cycle. A winter that keeps crossing back and forth over the freezing point can put it through dozens, and every one of those is a small expansion and contraction at every connection."

According to Becker, the connections carry the structural load rather than the boards a homeowner walks on. Those points include the ledger where a deck attaches to the house, the hangers where joists meet beams, the brackets at the tops of posts, and the hardware fastening each of those assemblies together.

Water is the mechanism that makes cycling consequential. Moisture entering gaps around lag bolts, joist hangers or ledger flashing expands as it freezes and contracts as it thaws. Repeated across a season, that action can widen an opening incrementally, admitting more water during the following season and continuing the process.

Becker said the ledger connection warrants particular attention because it transfers a substantial portion of the deck's load into the house framing, and because problems there tend to develop out of sight behind

flashing and trim rather than in visible locations. Ledger attachment and flashing are addressed in residential building code and are among the items a building inspector reviews.

The company said that also makes the connection relevant at resale. Findings involving ledger attachment or flashing can surface during a home inspection, which is generally an inconvenient point at which to encounter them.

Below grade, frost movement affects footings that do not extend past the local frost depth. Movement in the soil transfers upward through posts and into the framing above. Minnesota building practice sets deck footings below regional frost depth for that reason, and Becker said a properly set footing resists the movement well, though the hardware at the tops of posts still warrants inspection after previous winters.

Becker said the assessment homeowners can conduct themselves is straightforward and requires no tools. Trim or flashing that has separated near the ledger, hardware showing displacement or rust staining, a railing post that moves under real pressure, and stair stringers no longer sitting flush where they meet grade are all observable during an ordinary walk across the structure.

A deck that feels different underfoot than it did earlier in the season is worth noting as well, particularly where one area behaves differently from another. Becker said differences in how a structure carries weight often register underfoot before they become visible.

Timing matters for a practical reason. The company said the window for corrective work narrows as temperatures drop, since some materials and fasteners install more reliably above certain temperatures, and frozen ground complicates any work involving footings. Inspecting while conditions still permit repair leaves options open that a January discovery does not.

Becker said the distinction that matters most is between surface wear and structural condition, because the two call for entirely different work. Replacing boards addresses appearance. Framing, footings and the connection at the house determine whether a structure has remaining service life, and repair scopes without assessing those can conceal a problem rather than resolve it.

The company said material choice at the surface does not change what happens at the connections. Composite and PVC surfaces require less maintenance than wood and handle moisture differently, but the framing, hardware and footings supporting any of those surfaces respond to seasonal cycling in the same way.

A structural assessment typically covers footing condition and alignment, post plumb, framing and beam connections, hardware and fasteners, and the ledger attachment with its associated flashing. Those findings

determine whether a deck warrants targeted repair, a new surface installed over existing framing, or a full rebuild.

Homeowners seeking regional climate context can consult the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources State Climatology Office, which publishes temperature and precipitation records for the state. The National Weather Service office serving the Twin Cities issues seasonal outlooks covering winter conditions. Local building departments maintain current requirements for deck construction, including footing depth and ledger attachment specifications applicable in each jurisdiction.

Rosebud Decks & Porches is a custom deck and porch builder serving the Twin Cities metropolitan area and western Wisconsin. The company designs and builds residential and commercial decks in composite, PVC and wood, and provides deck framing, deck repair, porch construction, pergolas, railing and deck lighting. It has specialized in deck and porch construction since 2018.

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Rosebud Decks & Porches

Rosebud Decks & Porches is a certified deck building specialist based in North St. Paul, serving the Twin Cities metro and Western Wisconsin. We design and build custom decks, porches, pergolas, privacy walls, and railing systems

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