

EJS Deck and Home Solutions Introduces Drought Deck Guidance

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EJS Deck and Home Solutions has introduced new guidance for homeowners on how extended dry conditions affect outdoor structures, following a drought across Massachusetts that has now persisted through parts of three consecutive years. The guidance covers what changes in a deck during prolonged dry weather, what homeowners can observe themselves, and when a structure warrants professional evaluation.

As of late July, roughly two thirds of Massachusetts was under active drought conditions according to the United States Drought Monitor, with the majority classified as moderate and a smaller portion at severe. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs has issued a series of drought declarations since 2024, citing declining groundwater levels, reduced streamflow, and falling pond levels across nearly every region of the state. The Southeast Region, which includes much of the South Shore, was placed at a mild drought level in May.

Homeowners in the region generally associate deck movement with winter. Frost heave is the familiar mechanism, and the deep frost line that governs footing depth in Massachusetts reflects it. After several dry years, the more immediate concern for many properties is the opposite condition.

Wood loses moisture in sustained dry weather, and it changes dimension as it does. Boards shrink slightly across their width, which opens gaps that were tight when the deck was built. Surface checking appears as fine splits along the grain, and cupping or warping develops where one face has dried faster than the other. The same process affects framing lumber beneath the surface, and as framing members shrink, the fasteners and connectors holding them can loosen.

"The surface tells you the least," said Josh Steinman, Owner of EJS Deck and Home Solutions. "Composite and PVC do not change with moisture the way wood does, so a deck can look completely sound from above while the wood frame underneath has been moving for two summers."

Ground conditions are widely misunderstood in this market. Much of the published advice on drought and foundations describes soils with high clay content, which shrink substantially as they dry and swell again when moisture returns. Soils across the South Shore are largely coastal-plain sands and glacial till, which behave differently and are far less prone to that cycle. Movement is still possible where fill, silt, or organic material sits beneath a structure, and prolonged dry conditions can expose or undermine shallow footings, but the mechanism is not the shrink-and-swell pattern common in other parts of the country.

The guidance recommends that homeowners walk their deck and look for a small number of observable changes. Gaps between boards that have widened noticeably since the deck was installed indicate moisture loss in the decking. A railing that feels different underhand than it did the previous season suggests movement at a post connection. Stairs that have settled at one side, soft or eroded ground around a post base, or a visible gap where the deck meets the house are all worth noting.

Timing matters when assessing what is found. Wood moves with humidity throughout the season, and some apparent changes settle back after a period of normal conditions. The guidance suggests recording observations rather than acting on them immediately, and paying attention to what has not corrected itself after several weeks.

"Write it down and look again later," Steinman said. "Most of what people notice in August is seasonal. What matters is the thing that is still there in October."

When drought does break, the return of moisture introduces its own movement as soils re-wet and timber takes up water again. Structures that have been carrying loosened connections through a dry period can shift further during that transition, which is why the guidance treats the current period as a useful time for homeowners to establish a baseline.

Where framing damage proves extensive, targeted repair is often not the appropriate remedy. Deterioration at ledger connections, widespread checking through joists, or compromised post-to-footing connections generally call for rebuilding the structure rather than addressing individual components. EJS Deck and Home Solutions builds replacement structures in composite, PVC, and wood, and evaluates existing framing as part of planning any rebuild.

EJS Deck and Home Solutions is a family-owned deck and outdoor living contractor serving the South Shore of Massachusetts from offices in Hanson and Norwell. Founded in 2021 by Josh Steinman, who has worked in construction for more than two decades, the company builds custom decks along with porches, screened porches, pergolas, gazebos, patios, and outdoor kitchens. It is a member of the North American Deck and Railing Association.

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EJS Deck and Home Solutions

EJS Deck & Home Solutions is a family-owned deck builder serving Hanson, MA and the South Shore for over two decades. We specialize in custom deck design, installation, framing, repair, and resurfacing

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