

Deck It Details Layout Planning as NFPA Cites July Grill Fire Peak

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Deck It, a Massachusetts deck builder specializing in composite and PVC construction, has outlined how grill placement and circulation are weighed during deck design, following National Fire Protection Association data identifying July as the peak month for home grilling fires. The company said the question comes up during layout planning rather than after a deck is finished.

NFPA data released in May 2026 shows July as the peak month for home grilling fires, followed by June, May and August. Between 2020 and 2024, United States fire departments responded to an annual average of 12,141 home fires involving grills, hibachis or barbecues, including 6,110 structure fires. Those fires caused 15 civilian deaths, 171 reported civilian injuries and \$241 million in direct property damage, with nearly all losses resulting from the structure fires.

The association's guidance is directly relevant to deck design. Among its recommendations, NFPA advises placing a grill away from the home, deck railings, eaves and overhanging branches. Each of those is a fixed feature determined when a deck is laid out, not something a homeowner adjusts afterward.

"Where the grill ends up is usually decided by where there is room left for it, and that is a layout question," said Jake Zbikowski, co-founder of Deck It. "If nobody plans for it, it goes wherever the furniture is not."

Deck It said a deck sized only for its seating and dining functions often leaves the cooking position wherever space remains, which is frequently against a railing or tight to the house wall. Planning that position as its own zone during design changes the outcome without necessarily requiring a larger structure.

Circulation is the related consideration. During a gathering, people move between the house, the cooking area and wherever food is served, and those paths tend to converge. A layout that routes foot traffic directly past the cooking position creates congestion at the point where it is least useful, particularly on a deck

carrying more people than it does on an ordinary evening.

"People describe how they want to use the space, and the grill comes up almost as an afterthought," said Patrick Byrne, co-founder of Deck It. "It is worth putting on the plan early, because moving it later usually means moving everything else."

Multi-level designs offer one approach to separation. Placing cooking on one level and dining on another creates distance between the two without expanding the overall footprint, and the transition between levels naturally interrupts through traffic. On sloped properties, where multi-level layouts are already the practical response to grade, that separation comes at little additional cost in space.

Railings and stairs factor in as well. Both are structural elements positioned during design, and both shape how people move across a deck during heavy use. A stair placed to shorten the path between the kitchen door and the dining area functions differently than one positioned purely for yard access, and the difference is difficult to correct once the frame is built.

Deck It said the company produces a three-dimensional design during the planning phase, which allows a proposed layout to be reviewed against the actual property before construction begins. Furniture placement, cooking position and movement between zones can be examined at that stage rather than discovered after the deck is complete.

Overhead conditions are the other variable NFPA names. Mature tree canopy that provides welcome shade during a July afternoon is also material hanging above a heat source, and where those two considerations overlap on a particular property is specific to that property rather than general to a region.

Lighting extends the same reasoning into the evening. Cooking and serving continue well after sunset during the summer months, and integrated lighting at stairs, railings and level transitions is installed during construction rather than added to a finished structure, which is another reason the use of the space is worth establishing before framing begins.

NFPA also reported that failure to clean grills remains a leading contributing factor, with grease or fat buildup accounting for 20 percent of grilling fires, and that 76 percent of home grilling fires involved gas-fueled grills while 13 percent involved charcoal or other solid fuel. Deck It said maintenance of the appliance itself falls outside its scope, and that its role is limited to how a deck is laid out around it.

The company added that the same planning applies to existing decks. Homeowners evaluating an addition or a change in configuration are reconsidering how the space performs during its busiest periods rather than during ordinary use, and a deck that functions well for two people on a weekday evening may behave

differently when a dozen people are on it at once.

Founded in 2017 and focused exclusively on decking since 2021, Deck It designs and builds custom decks, porches and sunrooms for residential and commercial properties across Central Massachusetts and the MetroWest region, operating from a showroom in Bolton. Services include new deck construction, deck replacement, framing, railing systems, deck lighting and under-deck drainage. The company is a TimberTech Platinum Pro and Trex Pro Platinum contractor and a member of the North American Deck and Railing Association. In 2025 it was named Top Contractor of the Northeast by TimberTech, an award recognizing volume of TimberTech products installed.

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For more information about Deck It, contact the company here: Deck It - Framingham
Deck It Marketing +19789337290 marketing@deckitnow.com
945 Concord St, Framingham, MA 01701, United States

Deck It

Deck It is a Framingham, MA based, family-owned custom deck builder serving Central Massachusetts. Founded in 2017 by Jake and Pat, our team has focused exclusively on decking since 2021

Website: <https://deckitnow.com/>

Email: marketing@deckitnow.com

Phone: +19789337290

