



Black Label Decks & Outdoor Living Issues Deck Heat and Shade Guidance

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Black Label Decks & Outdoor Living has issued guidance for property owners on how decking material and overhead shade affect the usability of an outdoor space, following another summer of extended heat recorded in Lincoln.

The Lincoln Weather and Climate service at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln maintains a running count of days reaching 90 degrees or higher each year, alongside a hot weather climatology series that extends back to 1887. The National Weather Service office in Omaha issues heat advisories and warnings for the region based on temperature and humidity thresholds it publishes.

Surface temperature on a deck is not the same as air temperature. A horizontal surface in direct sun absorbs solar radiation through the afternoon and releases it slowly, which is why a deck can remain warm after the air has begun to cool. Color and material both influence that behavior. Darker surfaces absorb more visible light than lighter ones, and the effect holds across composite, PVC and wood.

"People plan a deck around the view or the door it comes off, which makes sense, because that is what they are looking at," said Lance Roach, Owner of Black Label Decks & Outdoor Living. "Orientation is the thing that decides whether they use it at four in the afternoon in July."

Manufacturers publish technical data for their own products, including surface temperature comparisons across color ranges within a product line. The company installs composite and PVC decking from TimberTech, TimberTech by AZEK, Fiberon, Deckorators, MoistureShield and Trex, along with softwoods including cedar and redwood and hardwoods including IPE, Tigerwood and Cumaru. Composite and plastic lumber deck boards are evaluated under standards published by ASTM International covering weathering and durability, and several manufacturers hold evaluation reports issued by ICC Evaluation Service, which are publicly searchable.

Wood behaves differently from manufactured boards under sustained heat and sun. The USDA Forest Products Laboratory publishes research on wood as an engineering material, including how species differ in dimensional stability and natural durability. Density varies considerably between the softwoods and the tropical hardwoods, and that difference affects weight, working properties and how the surface responds to seasonal cycles of sun and moisture.

Overhead structures address exposure directly rather than moderating it. The company builds custom pergolas, attached pergolas and louvered pergolas, along with covered decks and porches. Louvered systems allow the angle of the louvers to be changed, so a single structure can provide open sky, filtered light or cover depending on conditions and time of day. A fixed roof provides consistent shade but does not adjust.

Enclosure is a separate decision from shade. The company builds screened porches, three season rooms and sunrooms, each of which extends the usable portion of the year by a different amount. A screened porch keeps air moving while providing a barrier. A three season room encloses the space more completely. A sunroom is built for climate controlled comfort and natural light. Underdeck systems, installed beneath an elevated deck, direct water away from the framing and make the space below usable as a covered area.

"A louvered roof and a solid roof are two different answers to the same question," Roach said. "One of them commits you, and the other one does not. Which is right depends on what the space is for."

Orientation determines how much of a structure is exposed and when. A west-facing deck receives direct sun through the late afternoon, while a north-facing space stays shaded for much of the day. Solar position data for any latitude is published by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and can be reviewed during design. The path of the sun also changes across the season, so a structure that is shaded in June may sit in direct light in September at the same hour.

The company produces 3D models, 2D floorplans and 3D printed models during the design stage so that layout and orientation can be reviewed before materials are ordered. Changes made at that stage do not require rework once construction has begun.

Railing and lighting interact with the same conditions. Aluminum railing systems carry factory-applied finishes, and coating performance for architectural aluminum is specified under standards published by the American Architectural Manufacturers Association, which address weathering, chalking and color retention. Deck lighting, including step, post cap, rail and landscape fixtures, extends usable hours into the part of the evening when surface temperatures have dropped.

Late summer is when many property owners begin planning projects for the following season, which places design decisions about orientation, material and shade several months ahead of construction.

Black Label Decks & Outdoor Living was founded in Lincoln, Nebraska in 2018 and designs and builds custom decks, fences, gates and outdoor living structures for residential and commercial clients across Lincoln and surrounding communities.

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