

Hemlock Decks & Porches Issues Wind Uplift Guidance for Covered Decks

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With the climatological peak of the Atlantic hurricane season approaching in early September, Hemlock Decks & Porches has issued guidance on wind uplift in covered decks, porches and other roofed outdoor structures, and on why a below-normal seasonal forecast does not reduce the case for checking them.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration updated its Atlantic outlook on August 6, maintaining a below-normal forecast and raising the probability of a below-normal season to 75 percent. Forecasters revised the expected range to seven to 13 named storms, of which two to six could become hurricanes, including up to two major hurricanes. Two named storms had formed by that point in the season and no hurricanes.

NOAA attributed the forecast to a strengthening El Niño, which increases wind shear and suppresses storm development, and has been explicit that a seasonal outlook is not a landfall forecast. In announcing the initial May outlook, National Weather Service Director Ken Graham noted that uncertainty remains in how any season unfolds and that reviewing preparedness ahead of time is essential.

For inland New England the wind that damages outdoor structures often arrives without a name. The Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University recorded a severe thunderstorm event on July 4 that produced gusts of 87 miles per hour in Suffolk County, widespread tree damage and more than 1.3 million power outages, along with a three-inch hailstone in Connecticut. No tropical system was involved.

Wind uplift is the mechanism that makes roofed outdoor structures behave differently from open decks. Air moving across and beneath a roof surface produces negative pressure above it and positive pressure below, and the net effect is a load pulling the structure upward rather than pressing it down. An open deck experiences far less of this because there is no roof plane for the pressure differential to act on.

Structural design addresses uplift through what engineers call a continuous load path, meaning an unbroken chain of connections carrying force from the roof through the rafters, into the beams and posts, and down into the foundation. The chain is only as strong as its weakest connection, which is why uplift failures typically occur at a single joint rather than through a member breaking.

"A covered porch is a different structure from a deck with a roof added to it, and the difference is what happens at the connections," said Teddy Labonte, Owner of Hemlock Decks & Porches. "The load path either runs all the way to the footing or it stops somewhere, and where it stops is where you find the problem afterwards."

Mechanical connectors are what maintain that path at each joint. Connector manufacturers publish rated uplift capacities for their products, and the rating that applies depends on the fastener schedule, the material being fastened into and the specific joint. Fasteners adequate for gravity loads are not necessarily rated for tension, which is a distinction that matters when a roof is added to an existing structure.

Design wind speed for a given location comes from the climatic and geographic design criteria in the residential code as adopted by the state, and exposure category, roof pitch, structure height and span all factor into what the connections have to resist. Because those variables are site-specific, uplift resistance for a covered structure is determined by engineering evaluation of the particular project rather than by a general specification.

Foundation capacity completes the path. Resisting uplift requires a foundation able to take tension rather than only compression, which is a separate question from frost depth. Frost depth requirements address heave, meaning upward movement caused by freezing soil, while uplift resistance depends on the foundation's tensile capacity and its engagement with the surrounding soil. Hemlock Decks & Porches installs both helical piers and traditional concrete footings, selected according to the soil profile, the loads involved and the depth at which suitable bearing is present. Helical piles are rated for tension as well as compression, which is one factor considered where a roofed structure is planned.

Structures where a roof was added after the original build warrant particular attention, since the connections and foundation were sized for the loads that existed at the time.

"The ones worth looking at are the porches that started life as decks," Labonte said. "Somebody put a roof on at some point and the framing underneath never changed, which is fine until the wind finds it."

Covered structures showing movement at post connections, separation where the roof meets the house or loosened hardware at the beam can be evaluated. Hemlock Decks & Porches handles permitting and

produces structural drawings in house. More information is available at hemlockcontractingco.com.

Hemlock Decks & Porches is a family-owned deck, porch and outdoor living contractor operating across Massachusetts and Connecticut, and is a TrexPro Platinum Installer and TimberTech Gold PRO Contractor.

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For more information about Hemlock Decks Porches and Home Additions, contact the company here: Hemlock Decks Porches and Home Additions Hemlock Contracting +17745250509 support@deckfencemarketers.com 24 Everard St, Worcester, MA 01605, United States

Hemlock Decks Porches and Home Additions

Specializing in decks, additions , porches, roofing , siding , and remodels , our main goal is to bring quality work at an affordable price on a timely basis.

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