

Siding Hides Warning Signs of Deck Collapse

Six injured when landing gives way

In early May, attracted by the sound of an ambulance, a group of people went outside to see what was going on, only to end up needing an ambulance themselves when the second-story landing they were standing on pulled away from a residence in Normal, Ill. As a result of the collapse, six women were taken to the local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

Ironically, May was “Deck Safety Month,” but the cause of this collapse wouldn’t have been visible in a routine inspection, according to Greg Troemel, director of inspections for Normal. The approximately 4-foot-by-7-foot landing and the stairs were intact when they separated from the building, and the building itself seemed to be in good condition.

Once the vinyl siding and sheathing were removed, however, the reasons behind the collapse became clear. When the structure had been built 18 years earlier, an I-joist floor system was used, with a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch OSB rim joist rather than solid dimensional lumber — without extra blocking.

Since the rim joist was the primary fastening point for the landing, the lags had only $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of material to attach to.

Compounding the problem was inadequate flashing of the connection. Water had intruded over the years, deteriorating not only the rim joist but also the header above the first-floor door (which was immediately below the second-floor door) and eight to 10 studs on either side of it.

To repair the damage, dimensional lumber was sistered to the second-floor joists, the rim joist was replaced with treated lumber, blocking was added between joists — giving the lags 3 inches to attach to — and the deteriorated first-floor header and studs were replaced.

A Bloomington, Ill., newspaper, the *Pantagraph*, reported that SAMI, the company that owns the now-repaired rental property, would be removing the siding from other properties built in the same time period in order to check for concealed damage on those buildings. — *Laurie Elden*

Housing-Market Numbers Still Down

Both the new-home building and remodeling industries have suffered setbacks this year. Housing starts were down 16.1 percent in April from a year ago, and new permits were down even more — 28.1 percent lower than April 2006 levels — according to Commerce Department figures. Most analysts agree that large inventories of unsold new homes and stricter lending standards will likely

continue to put a damper on residential construction, at least for the rest of 2007 and even into 2008.

The decline in remodeling activity is not nearly as dramatic as that in new-home building, but it’s still not positive news. David Seiders, chief economist at NAHB, predicted in a May teleconference that remodeling spending would equal about \$233 billion in 2007, which, when adjusted for

inflation, is a 1.5 percent decline from 2006 levels. He further predicted a .5 percent decline in 2008, again after inflation is taken into account.

Kermit Baker, director of the Remodeling Futures Program at the Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies, participated in the same teleconference. He and Seiders agreed that discretionary improvements, such as kitchens and baths,

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would take the biggest hit, rather than maintenance and repairs.

Seiders pointed out, however, that the overall economy is strong, and continued home building and an aging housing stock mean there will be a constant supply of homes to remodel. "Quite simply," he said, "we're adding more homes each year than we're tearing down, and these will eventually require remodeling."

Baker noted another factor in the industry's favor: Past increases in home prices have led to an increase in homeowner equity that can be tapped to pay for improvements and repairs. — L. E.

Code-Compliant and "Green," Too

Wolmanized L3 Outdoor Wood (see *Decking News*, May/June 2007) recently received a couple of noteworthy nods: a report of code compliance from the International Code Council Evaluation Service, and inclusion in BuildingGreen's *GreenSpec Directory*.

L3 Wood is pressure-treated with a combination of organic (carbon-based), nonmetallic chemicals formulated by Arch Treatment Technologies of Smyrna, Ga. According to a report (ESR-1477) issued by the ICC-ES in February, the product is compliant with a number of codes — including the IBC 2006 and the IRC 2006 — when used in aboveground locations where wood must resist fungal decay or termites.

ESR-1477 further notes that the use of corrosion-resistant fasteners is still required when building with L3. However, unlike with most currently available treated lumber, the use of aluminum fasteners and flashing is permitted.

A nonprofit subsidiary of the ICC, ICC-ES was formed in 2003 from the union of four evaluation services (National Evaluation Service, BOCAI Evaluation Services, ICBO Evaluation Service, and SBCCI Public Service Testing and Evaluation Services). The ANSI-accredited organization reviews a building product after the manufacturer submits an application and, if it finds the product to be code compliant, issues a technical report summarizing its findings.

These reports contain concise and useful information about installation

and conditions of use; builders may also submit them to permitting agencies to help determine whether a product complies with local building regulations.

ESR-1477 and reports on other building products are available for free download at www.icc-es.org/Evaluation_Reports. Users can search for individual reports or select a specific Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) category, such as Wood and Plastics Wood Treatment, and view all product reports that satisfy that description.

L3 Wood has also earned a spot in the *GreenSpec Directory*, a list of more than 2,000 "environmentally preferable" building products compiled by Brattleboro, Vt.-based BuildingGreen, publisher of *Environmental Building News*. L3 Wood was found to be "green" in two categories: "reduces pesticide treatments" and "exceptional durability and low maintenance." A print copy of the *GreenSpec Directory* can be purchased at www.buildinggreen.com.

To see the directory online, including descriptions of green products, manufacturer information, and links to additional resources, go to www.greenbuildingblocks.com and select the "product guide" tab. This Web site was just launched in May by Blue Egg, a media company focused on sustainable living. The site also offers reference tools, a directory of green-building professionals, and a calendar of green-building events. — L.E.

Despite the generally gloomy construction forecast, the latest survey from the American Institute of Architects has some good news for deck builders. Even as home and lot sizes have leveled off, investment in outdoor living areas has continued to increase, according to 63 percent of the architects surveyed in the AIA Home Design Trends Survey for the first quarter of 2007. In another trend that may affect deck design, almost three-quarters of the architects surveyed reported increasing consumer interest in accessibility as boomers care for aging parents or plan for their own retirement.

This summer, employers in Washington state with at least one employee must create a written plan to prevent heat-related

illness. An emergency rule, which was also enacted last year, requires employers to supply at least one quart of water per employee per hour; respond to employees showing heat-related distress; and train employees and supervisors in heat-related-illness prevention. A number of free resources related to the prevention of heat stress can be downloaded from the Washington Department of Labor and Industries Web site at www.lni.wa.gov/safety/topics/AtoZ/heatstress.

The National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) will be offering a Spanish-language version of its Certified Lead Carpenter exam beginning in August. For more information, go to www.nari.org.

A tax break for small businesses was signed into law on May 25 by President Bush. The previous law, section 179, allowed small businesses to fully deduct fixed-asset expenses, rather than depreciate them over five to 10 years. The deduction had been capped at \$100,000 in 2003, and indexed for inflation through 2009. The Small Business and Work Opportunity Act of 2007 extends the deduction one year, through 2010, and increases the deductible limit to \$125,000 for 2007.

2007 Shows & Events

September 11-14

JLC Live Midwest

Residential Construction Show
Hanley Wood Exhibitions
Minneapolis
800/261-7769
www.jlclive.com

September 27-30

Home Improvement and Remodeling Show

Oregon Remodelers Association
Portland, Ore.
503/788-2274
www.oregonremodelers.com

September 27-29

Sunbelt Builders Show

Texas Association of Builders and NAHB
Grapevine, Texas
800/252-3625
www.sunbeltbuildersshow.com

October 8-9

Wood-Plastic and Natural Fiber Composites 2007

Principia Conferences
Baltimore
410/531-5211
www.principiaconferences.com

October 9-12

Remodeling Show 2007

Hanley Wood Exhibitions
Las Vegas
866/860-1964
www.theremodelingshow.com

October 17-20

StonExpo 2007

Hanley Wood Exhibitions
Las Vegas
866/860-1971
www.stonexpo.com

October 26-28

Custom Builder Symposium

NAHB
Naples, Fla.

800/368-5242, Ext. 8338
www.nahb.org

October 30-November 2

JLC Live Pacific Northwest

Residential Construction Show
Hanley Wood Exhibitions
Seattle
800/261-7769
www.jlclive.com

November 12-16

Aqua Show 2007

Hanley Wood Exhibitions
Las Vegas
800/766-7807
www.aquashow.com

November 15-16

Building Industry Show 2007

Building Industry Association of Southern California
Long Beach, Calif.
909/396-9993
www.buildingindustryshow.com