

CREIA Urges Property Owners to Have All Guardrails Decks and Balconies Professionally Inspected

Aliso Viejo, June 2017: As the weather gets nicer, social gatherings increasingly move outdoors. The California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA) urges property owners to have their guardrails, decks and balconies professionally inspected prior to any gatherings.

Most experts agree that the typical service life of a wood deck is around 10-15 years. There are over 50 million decks in the U.S.; many were built prior to the building codes providing any significant guidance. Over half of all decks are believed to be beyond their service life and in need of significant repairs or replacement. Millions of decks were built by unqualified persons using substandard construction methods. According to a 2005 study by Virginia Tech University, none of the most common wood deck guardrail construction methods can meet even the minimum building code requirements for guard strength.

“Wood decks are complex structures. They are exposed to harsh environmental conditions and they are failing at an alarming rate.” According to Skip Walker, Master CREIA Inspector. Further, “Guardrails are significantly the point of failure on a deck or balcony. People gather on the deck, they lean against the guard – and it fails all too often resulting in tragedy.” In a 2007 study by Morse Technology, deck collapses reportedly increased an average of about 21% per year between 2000 and 2007. Deck and balcony failures are so common that the media often will not cover them unless it was unusually spectacular, such as the 2015 Berkeley Kitteridge balcony tragedy. The statistics are sobering. According to Don Bender, Director Wood Materials & Engineering Department at Washington State University, “When a deck collapses, 75% of the people on it will be seriously injured or killed.”

A 2015 study by Legacy Services LLC estimates that between 2010 and 2014 there were about 7,500 to 8,500 injuries per year are the result of structural failures in decks, porches and balconies. Between 2000 and 2006, there were at least 30 deaths reported as a direct result of deck failures.

CREIA has joined forces with the North American Deck and Railing Association (NADRA) to help ensure that CREIA inspectors are trained on proper inspection protocols for wood decks. According the Michael Beaudry, NADRA Executive Director, “If we assume that a conservative 10 percent of decks need significant repair or outright replacement, that means the total number of unsafe decks is around five million. Unfortunately, that number is probably much higher.”

Walker adds, “If your guardrails move easily when you push – they are suspect. Do not take chances, have them inspected.” If you are unsure about your deck or balcony’s condition, contact your local CREIA Certified Inspector.

Go www.creia.org/find-an-inspector or http://suppliers.nadra.org/industry_services/home_inspections/ to locate a qualified CREIA or NADRA inspector near you.

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