

The Inspection of balcony and deck

Henry Liu CPBC 53115 Canada Association of Home and Property Inspectors of BC

Sometimes I have trouble to tell the difference between balcony and deck. I think normally balconies are smaller without enclosure underneath. On the contrary decks are bigger and do not have roofs. Most chances there may be a garage under the deck or totally open with post support and stairs attached. Anyway this is not important. As an affiliate of the building, the former is built for aesthetic. The rear is more useful for entertainment.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

It could be unbelievable that there are lots of accidents related to the failure of decks, balconies, guardrail and stairs. Therefore I paid more attention to their inspection every time. There are some apparent conditions such as rotten stairs (figure 1), loose handrail which are easy to tell by common sense. Some issues may not cause people concern but actually safety hazards. For example the space between guardrail spindles over 4" or the horizontal bars installed on it cause kids to fall off if they play around there. Also, because we cannot see the layer of water proof, we have to evaluate the possible of leakage by the construction, drainage configuration and material. Ex figure 2 the guardrail is fixed by bolts on the floor, which damaged water underlayment and caused tile crack. The correct method is to fixed guardrail at the side of balcony. If tiles applied, Grouting and Caulking are supposed to be a regular service.

Lots of home owners added deck by themselves without government permit, which has to be checked carefully. The floor could be laid by wood boards with the space in between to drain water or covered with the sheeting material like PVC or concrete often found in new buildings. If the deck was built 3 stairs high over the ground, the guardrail and handrail have to be in place to avoid people falling down. This is a safety hazard and very important. In order to prevent moisture and improve ventilation, it should be considered when start building a deck. Too low or wood soil contact is not allowed. Here we give out some check and maintenance tips on decks. 1. To check the components of the wood deck loose or damaged annually, including to make sure the handrail/guardrail secured; the size of beams and joists is enough and no bent or warp, which may need professionals inspected; the wood soil contact at the post and rotten wood; the loose or lean ledge which may be caused by building uneven settlement or the frost heave of the deck foundation due to the direct connection between the deck and building; 2. To check if moss or fungus on deck boards, plant pots and carpets not good to deck floor for holding moisture, all can cause the premature failure of the wood boards; 3. To check leakage at the intersection of the wall and deck boards, this is a weak point of water intrusion especially for the deck without roof or overhang; 4. To check if the nail heads popped-up a walk hazard or the setting nails rusty and caused wood rotten (figure 3), which can be fixed by caulking regularly.