

## Stay Up On Building Codes To Keep Deck Sales Rolling

By Diana Hanson

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As a decking dealer or distributor, you are dependent on manufacturers to not only produce products that are up to standard, but also products that are acceptable to the consumer.

The manufacturers have a lot on their plate when they bring something to market. You as the dealer take a calculated risk every time you make a purchase. The decking materials you stock are affected by decisions made in the building code arena.

Every few years a new version of building code is issued. Building code is developed in cycles that provide a platform for anyone to submit changes to the code. In attendance at hearings are building officials, members of industry, engineers, university professors, government officials, members of coalitions, and consumers. That's a lot of people with a lot of different concerns - and sometimes agendas - all pushing for changes to the code.

It is important to make certain that the products you are purchasing for resale not only meet the testing requirements in place in the industry, but also that building code is not changing in a direction that makes the product difficult to sell.

Until recent years, the decking industry was given only cursory attention in the code. Largely due to the fact that decks are exterior structures and often separate from the house, they were not considered to be within the purview of the code. That perspective has now changed, and there have been many changes that affect decks entered into building code. Coverage of decks in building code is far from complete; however, there are already sections of code that are difficult to interpret and enforce on the job site.

As a dealer, you trust your supplier to be vigilant and watchful of code development. Some manufacturers may think that because they submit their products for testing through the ICC-ES or another evaluation service, they have done what is necessary to protect the salability of their product. This is simply not true. Building code operates separately from evaluation protocols and testing. The manufacturer may do everything right as far as going through the process and spending their budget on evaluation; yet they can get blown out of the water by a code change that makes their previous testing inadequate.

How active in code development are your suppliers? Are they protecting their and your interests in the building code arena? Simply stated, what affects one member of our industry affects us all. The more we work together, the more likely we will be able to protect our industry, while at the same time provide a safe, enjoyable home improvement option that the consumer desires.

Specifically relating to decks and railings, dealers must be aware of the direction that code has taken toward more restrictive regulations. Even if you are a distributor of decking boards, and the code change has to do with ledger attachments, you will still want to be informed, as it affects the completed structure (the deck). If building code for decks becomes overly restrictive, consumers may very well choose to build something less difficult to get a permit for. They may put in a patio or rock instead of a deck.

Check with the code representatives of your suppliers and find out what is going on that might affect your sales. You can also do some research yourself using the International Code Committee website, [www.iccsafe.org](http://www.iccsafe.org).

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