

Hello from Howard Lamcke! Summer is in full swing. We are as busy as everyone else, and it has been wonderful to hear from a lot of old friends. We have added a couple of members to the crew and reconnected with some subcontractors and suppliers to keep up with work. We are experiencing extreme delays in getting plans drawn, permits out of the city, and inspection times. As always, careful advance planning and patience are the rule. We are always glad to look at new projects, and appreciate your business and referrals. Until then!

STRUCTUAL DRY ROT

I have been asked to look at a couple of balconies in light of the tragic collapse in Berkley last month. The engineers, lawyers and building inspectors have been weighing in on the cause. I’m sure that means more code enforcement and structural calculations in the future. In looking at the pictures, it is pretty obvious to me that the roof to wall flashing had failed, or more likely was non-existent in the first place. This flashing is the most basic element of the waterproofing system for a balcony or covered deck. It is usually galvanized steel, but would be longer lasting if it was made from copper or aluminum.

Another issue with many older cantilevered balconies is that the joists are made of common douglas fir. This is the most structural lumber but least resistant to rot of the common types of wood used on the west coast. Instead we have used pressure treated or redwood lumber for balconies and decks for a number of years now. We also use “joists caps” on all the underfloor framing. These are plaster or metal sleeves that are placed on top of the joists and beams. We often use them on regular ground level decks for extra protection.

There are several ways to consider when repairing a cantilevered deck or balcony. If only a few joists are damaged, or the damage is to the top inch or so of each joist, it might be possible to sister them. This means removing the rot, treating the wood with a preservative, and adding pressure treated lumber to the sides of the existing joists. We always add caps or flashing to this new system as well. If the damage is severe, it will be necessary to replace the joists. This will require cutting into the interior ceilings and adding new structural members. The baseline rule is one third cantilevered, two thirds attached, but obviously, more is better. If it is not possible to access the interior, it will then be necessary to set up a post and beam situation and eliminate the cantilever all together.

As is being discussed in Berkley; maintenance and inspection is of utmost importance. If you suspect dry rot in any of your decks and balconies you should seek professional advice before it’s too late. Next month; preparing for after the drought.