



DECK AND BALCONY SAFETY CHECKLIST

THE ANNUAL WALK, STRUCTURE BY STRUCTURE | TWIN CITIES METRO

Walk every elevated structure once a year, ideally in spring after the snow clears. Most failure points sit out of sight, so look underneath. For anything that shows movement, rot, rust, or a connection you are not sure about, bring in a licensed structural engineer before the structure is used again.

THE FIVE FAILURE POINTS

- ☐ **The ledger.**
Bolted, not nailed, attached to the structural rim joist, with continuous flashing. Water behind a ledger rots the connection from the inside, and a failed ledger is the number one cause of deck collapse.
- ☐ **The posts and footings.**
Footings carried below the frost line. Look for posts that have shifted, tilted, or lifted, and for any post sitting on soil or a patio slab.
- ☐ **The fasteners and connectors.**
Pressure-treated lumber needs hot-dipped galvanized or stainless hardware. Look for rust streaks, backed-out screws, and joist hangers pulling away.
- ☐ **The railing.**
Grab every guard and push. Movement is a work order.
- ☐ **The surface.**
Soft, spongy, or discolored boards mean rot underneath, and a warning that the framing below may be going too.

THE CODE NUMBERS TO CONFIRM

- ☐ **A guard on any walking surface more than 30 inches up (IRC R312.1.1).**
- ☐ **Guard height: at least 36 inches on townhome decks, 42 on condo and apartment balconies.**
Confirm which category each of your structures falls under with your building official.
- ☐ **No opening that passes a 4-inch sphere (IRC R312.1.3).**
- ☐ **Strength: a 200-pound load at any point on the top rail, and a 40 pounds per square foot live load.**

BALCONIES, SPECIFICALLY

- ☐ **Check walking surfaces over living space for cracks and pooling water.**
The membrane under that surface is what keeps water out of the framing.
- ☐ **Check the ceilings below balconies for stains.**

THE RECORD

- ☐ **Photograph and date anything questionable.**
That record is what turns a vague worry into a funded repair, and it belongs in the reserve file.

WHEN WERE YOUR DECKS LAST GIVEN A HARD LOOK?

A first call takes about fifteen minutes and costs nothing, 612-440-8660. The full guide: trupointhoa.com/knowledge-center/decks-balconies-railings