

INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL
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ICC issues alert and safety tips for porches

The International Code Council advises homeowners, condominium owners and apartment dwellers to visually inspect porches, balconies, elevated-free standing decks and similar structures at least twice a year for safety.

According to ICC, things to look out for may include:

Split wood, rotting wood, loose or missing nails or screws
Loose or missing anchors where the porch attaches to a house or building
Missing, damaged or loose support beams and planking
Wobbly handrails or guardrails

"If the porch moves when one person walks or jumps on it, or you have any doubt about its safety, get a professional inspection," says ICC Code Development Vice President Mike Pfeiffer, who is a licensed professional engineer. "If the porch is crowded and people have difficulty moving about, it probably exceeds capacity."

According to building safety codes published by the ICC, residential porches should withstand a minimum of 40 pounds per square foot plus the weight of the porch. Balconies, which are only supported where they connect to the building without additional posts, are designed to withstand 60 pounds per square foot.

When building or repairing a porch it is important to get a building permit from the local building department. This helps to ensure that the porch meets building safety codes and will be inspected by the local building inspector.

"Elevated decks pose an additional problem," says Pfeiffer. "An overloaded elevated deck can sway and become unstable. Elevated decks must be braced at the columns in addition to where the beams and columns connect."

The ICC, a 50,000-member association dedicated to building safety, develops the codes used to construct residential and commercial buildings, including homes and schools. The majority of U.S. cities, counties and states that adopt codes choose building safety and fire prevention codes developed by the ICC.