

A Deck Collapse Can Cause Catastrophic Injuries

Risk of Deck Collapse

According to the [North American Deck and Railing Association](#) (NADRA), there are more than 60 million decks in the United States. NADRA estimates that, overall, 30 million decks are past their useful lives. They need repair or replacement and may be at risk of structural failure and collapse. Deck collapses happen, and when they do, people can suffer catastrophic injuries.

Common Causes of Deck Failures

Poor Construction

Decks that are not built to code or improperly installed can be at risk of collapse. A big part of the problem is that far too many decks are not built by qualified professionals. For instance, NADRA estimates that only 40% of new deck construction is handled by an experienced deck builder while 60% is done by homeowners, do-it-yourselfers, and other unqualified people. Accordingly, the vast majority of the unqualified 60% may not even know how to build a deck to code, or even know what the code is at all. Inexperienced and unknowledgeable deck builders may also use the wrong materials, improper fastenings, and improper footings. Not only would these mistakes cause a deck to fail inspection, but they could also lead to structural problems, safety hazards, and deck collapses.

Overloading

When decks are designed and built, they do have weight limits. Overloading a deck with too many people or heavy objects can cause a collapse. Deck collapses from too much weight are unfortunately common and can cause serious injuries and even fatalities. Deck overload combined with a compromised or unstable foundation can be a recipe for disaster.

Aging or Deterioration

Decks that are still being used past their useful lives. Decks that are not properly maintained can become weakened over time, making them more susceptible to collapse. Factors including rotting wood, rusted or corroded metal, and insect damage lead to deterioration. Plus, environmental conditions can accelerate the pace of deck deterioration.

Types of Injuries

Depending on the severity of the incident and other factors, deck collapses can cause catastrophic and less severe injuries including:

- Broken arms, legs, and fractures to other body parts
- Serious cuts and bruising
- Concussions, spinal cord injuries, and traumatic brain injuries
- Internal bleeding and organ damage
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety
- Death

Liability

Depending on the circumstances, responsible parties may include:

- Whoever owns the property where the deck exists – the property owner may be negligent if they knew or should have known about the dangerous condition and failed to fix it.
- Whoever built the deck – this could be a professional contractor, handyman, or do-it-yourselfer. Regardless of who built the deck, they may be held liable if the collapse was caused by poor construction or failure to follow building codes and regulations.
- The manufacturer if the collapse was caused by a defect in a product or component of the deck. Perhaps the deck was built with a defective railing or a faulty fastener.
- Other third parties such as architects, engineers, etc.

Excerpted from information posted by Atlanta attorney Bryan Baer, who has twenty (20) years of legal experience representing clients in serious and catastrophic personal injury and medical malpractice cases.

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