

The Fundamental Importance of Deck Blocking



By Neil Thorslund

*“ People's lives are often other than they seem to be on the surface. And sometimes, **what's underneath** and hidden is the best part of all, the part of real value.”*

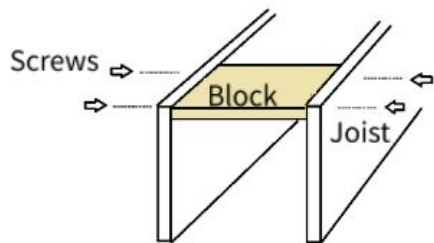
— **Stan Barstow**

How did my railing become so wobbly?

The installation of a deck and railing can be an exciting addition to your home, but the absence of **proper support** underneath the deck can cause unstable railing posts. Although it's common to associate this issue with the tightness of the bolts, the issue may lie within the deck itself.

What is Deck Blocking?

Deck Blocking is defined as the installation of wooden support between the joist of a composite or wooden deck, installed using coated deck screws.



Why should I bother with that?

For most railing systems, three-inch bolts are required by engineering design, but without proper deck blocking, the bolt will simply pass through the deck board and be **left hanging** underneath. When the bolt is suspended midway through the board, it is able to rotate and wiggle freely. This effect becomes amplified when a force is applied on the railing post, causing the railing to wobble on the surface of the deck board.



We can just add it afterwards, can't we?

Adding deck blocking after the fact can be quite an undertaking, and often requires the removal of deck boards. In some cases, workers are forced to work in awkward positions to access the underside of the deck. Most railing contractors avoid taking on the task of blocking, which can be **frustrating** for homeowners. We offer blocking services as we find that this is one of the most common problems we face when installing a railing system. Blocking installation is an availability on each one of our quotes.



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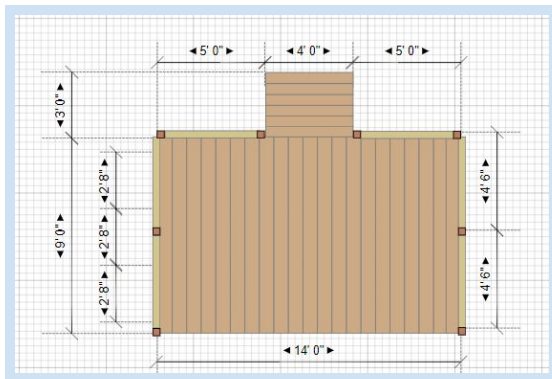
— Stan Barstow

What is the best course of action?

Adding deck blocks before installation is the best way of avoiding a wobbly railing. Speak with your deck builder about performing this installation. **Deck blocking** is sometimes an engineering design feature of the deck, in which case it is important to consult with an engineer regarding the specifications for your deck. In most cases, using sections of 2"x10" pressure-treated lumber screwed between the deck joists under the post location will provide sufficient support.

How do I know where to put deck blocking?

According to the national building code, for picket railing, the largest span between posts is 6 feet, and for glass railing, the largest span is 5 feet. Simply measure the length of the deck and divide it into segments which do not exceed these limits. This will give you the location of the railing posts. The deck blocking will be installed directly beneath each post.



Do I still need blocking for a side mounted rail system?

Side mounted rail systems require a minimum of 4 inches of wood blocking. If you are planning on side-mounting the railing, it is best to build the deck with **3 joists** at the edge of the deck. If you are adding a side mounted system to an existing deck with only 1 or 2 joists, it is important to mimic a deck joist by fastening a 2"x10" board along the full length of the outside joists. Doing blocking in the same way as the surface mount rail system will not be sufficient.

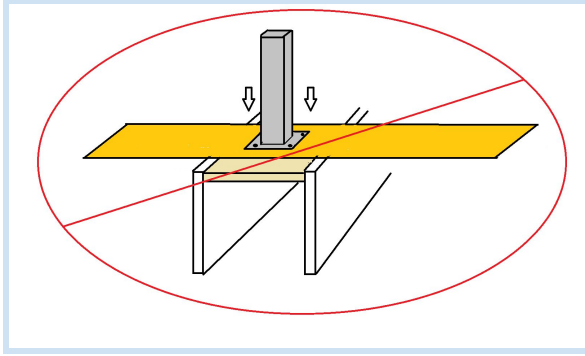


Why does the deck block need to be screwed to the joists? Can we just use the post lag bolts to secure it beneath the deck?

If the deck block is simply held beneath the deck board, the railing will only be supported if a force is applied parallel to the deck edge. Since the deck **joists are the strongest part** of the deck frame, securing the deck block to the joist will ensure there is no motion in the post when the force is applied perpendicular to the deck edge. This is the most important direction for maximum stability as it protects against potential force applied by those standing on the deck.

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Is using 2"x4" boards for deck blocking sufficient?

2"x4" boards are much **too small**. It is recommended to use 2"x10" blocking for the deck. In some cases, 2"x 8" will be sufficient, however this must first be determined by an engineer or architect.



If you have any questions in regards to blocking, give us a call or request a quote on our website.

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