

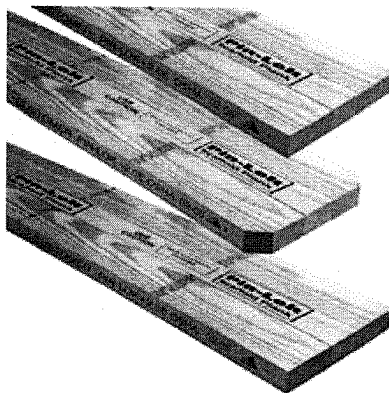
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Scaffold Plank



Proper Care Increases Product Life and Safety

By Jennie Farnsworth

Masonry job site is full of things that your workers need to keep an eye on. From correctly mixing the mortar to engineering the scaffolding properly, it seems

like so many things require attention. Sometimes this causes a form of "tunnel vision," where workers are so focused on the major day-to-day issues that some of the smaller elements can be overlooked. Unfortunately, every once in a while an overlooked minor thing can turn into a major problem.

In normal situations, planking can be considered such a minor thing that it may not receive as much attention as it deserves. Pull a piece from the stack, throw it on the scaffold, and go on with some of the more important tasks of the day. However, planks need to be cared for properly to keep them safe and working well into the future.

Whether you're using Dense Industrial 65 (DI65) or laminated veneer lumber (LVL), this article will review some of the "dos and don'ts" of planking for the masonry industry.

Common Mistakes

First and foremost, says Jared Kennison, Vice President of Marketing for Kennison Forest Products, Inc., of Sulphur, La., mason contractors need to buy quality products from respectable providers.

"Contractors need to make sure planks meet or exceed OSHA standards and that they are dealing with a reputable provider."

Once you have purchased the right product, then it's time to treat the product right. Carl Cook, President of Indian Mill in Houston, says the next common mistake is in how the planks are stored while not in use.

"Where you lose your boards is when they're stacked — this is with any kind of wood. This is a thing that needs to be yelled at contractors," says Cook. "When you get done with your boards and you stack them out in the field — even if you stack them up indoors — if you stack them up wet, two or three months later you've lost a lot of them. Any kind of wood that you make scaffold planks out of, rot is going to take place."

Cook says that they've completed experiments in the hot, damp Houston climate where they tight-stacked scaffold planks in the side yard and left them there.

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"You open it up, and there are things growing in there that you can't even identify," he says.

As a result of this common mistake, Indian Mill gives out stacking sticks so customers can store their planks properly, getting air between the units and letting them dry out while not in use.

Mike Gilleran, CEO of McCausey Lumber Co. of Roseville, Mich., adds that another common mistake is using planking for tasks that it isn't intended. From using planks on the ground in wet conditions to get better traction for heavy machinery, to placing them under scaffolding legs as a mudsill, these extracurricular activities can cause big problems.

"By putting the plank in the mud and resting their scaffold frames on top of it, they're able to prevent the scaffold frame from sinking in the mud. But what ends up happening is that every corner of that scaffold frame and all of them connected to it are creating what is called a point load," he explains. "The load that they're putting on it — let's say they're putting a 2,000-pound pallet of block or brick on top of that area — is creating a very small footprint on top of that plank that can fracture the plank, whether it's DI65 or LVL. Maybe that fracture is not visible because the plank is covered in mortar, dirt, dust or mud. Then they break down the scaffold frame and somehow that plank makes its way back into the stack of walkboards."

Education and Information

All three of our experts determined that education and information were key to alleviating the common mistakes that occur with scaffold planks.

"Being well-informed is a good thing for masons because plank can be a very hazardous type of equipment to have on the job if not properly cared for," says Kennison.

Gilleran agrees and says, "It boils down to education and people caring more for their equipment, themselves and their co-workers. Mason contractors would love it if they could buy a board and make it last five, six or seven years. By and large, it just doesn't happen. It doesn't get cared for.

"A lot of these groups aren't aware of the information and literature that's available to them, or they're not sharing it with the people in the field that need the information the most," he continues. "I don't think mason contractors realize that some of the labor they're hiring to do this physical work really don't know or understand what's acceptable and what's not, or what's a potential problem and what's not."

Storage and Care Review

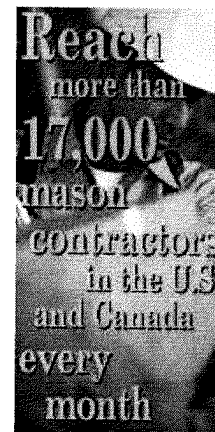
Provided by Kennison Forest Products, the following care tips are a good review of important safety information to make sure your planking practices aren't rusty (see also the sidebar article on pg. 24).

- **Keep Scaffold Planks Dry**

The strength and performance of a scaffold plank is reduced by moisture.

- **Storage**

Store in a dry, well-ventilated area. Storing in wet or unventilated areas will accelerate wood decay and plank deterioration. Always allow wet planks to dry quickly by providing proper air circulation.



- **Protection**

Protect planks from extreme weather conditions, including excessive exposure to water and temperatures exceeding 150 degrees Fahrenheit. Store planks under a roof or under a porous cover that will shed water while allowing moisture to escape.

- **Stacking Stored Planks**

Keep planks stacked in bundles off the ground and supported by stickers spaced no more than eight feet apart. Be sure to line up the stickers between the bundles with the ground stickers. This will allow easy forklift access and provide air circulation. Misalignment of the stickers can damage the planks by creating a bow. Do not store heavy objects on the planks.

- **Safety First**

Remember to immediately remove damaged scaffold planks from service. Damaged planks may result in injury or death.

Long-term Use over Short-term Abuse

Even if you and your crews are knowledgeable about the proper care and storage of plank, sometimes it comes down to labor versus materials. Labor hours are a huge part of your bottom line, so sometimes shortcuts to proper storage prevail in an effort to lessen this expense. Occasionally, one might think that short-term abuse to tools and equipment are preferred if it means cutting down on labor expenses. However, this philosophy can sometimes end up costing more money down the line if you have to replace planking more frequently due to these shortcuts.

However, planking is — to some extent — a disposable asset. Even with above-average care, you will eventually have to replace these units.

"If the contractor takes care of their product, uses and maintains it the way it should be or the best that they can, they shouldn't feel bad if they have to replace it," explains Gilleran. "It's just like a car, you have to buy a new car every so often — you put so many miles on it, so be it. But if you don't change the oil or maintain the transmission, you are going to have to replace it sooner."

Kennison agrees, "Potentially, a well-cared for DI65 or LVL scaffold plank can last several years. The longevity often coincides with how well they're stored, taken care of, and the type of abuse that they take."

"We have contractors here in Texas that, because it is a wet climate, some of them actually stand their boards on end," adds Cook. "If they only have 200 to 300 boards, some have slots that they set their boards in and set them up on edge with air between them and let them dry out. People who do this, they'll keep their boards for years."

"You know it's a big investment for contractors to buy scaffold plank," he continues. "We've just seen so many people lose their material, we're just trying to educate them and help them out."

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- [Evaluation and Visual Inspection](#)
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- [Return to Table of Contents](#)