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Standard Specification for Establishing Performance Ratings for Wood-Plastic Composite Deck Boards and Guardrail Systems (Guards or Handrails) and Plastic Lumber Deck Boards, Stair Treads, Guards, and Handrails¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D7032; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reappraisal. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reappraisal.

1. Scope

1.1 This specification covers the procedures to establish a performance rating for wood-plastic composite (WPC) deck boards. This specification also defines the procedures to establish a performance rating for WPC guards and handrails. The purpose of this specification is to establish the basis for code recognition of these products or systems in exterior applications where combustible construction is allowed (see X1.1).

NOTE 1—While WPCs may contain wood fiber, the presence of wood fiber in the composite is not required by this standard. Other lignocellulosic materials may be used. For WPC deck boards and guardrail systems evaluated according to this standard, the structural, physical, and fire attributes may or may not exhibit similarity to those of wood due to the presence, type, and quantity of plastic(s) in the composite. WPCs should not be assumed to behave similarly to wood. For example, to address the influence of plastic in the composite, special considerations in the standard address sensitivity to temperature, ultraviolet (UV) exposure, and freeze-thaw resistance.

1.1.1 The plastic component of wood-plastic composites and plastic lumber covered by this specification shall consist primarily of thermoplastics.

1.2 Deck boards, stair treads, guards, and handrails covered by this specification are permitted to be of any code compliant shape and thickness (solid or non-solid).

NOTE 2—While WPCs are produced in a broad range of ratios of fiber to resin it is recognized that the performance requirements in this specification are valid for any material or combination of materials used as deck boards, guards, or handrails. For products made primarily from resin, or for products that exhibit highly plastic properties (for example, more than 3 % strain without rupture in a standard flexural test under ambient conditions), users are directed to Specification ~~D6662~~ for additional guidance.

1.3 A deck board, and a deck board used as a stair tread, are assigned a span rating indicating its ability to comply with model code specified functions identified for its specific end use. A guard or handrail is recognized for its ability to meet minimum code requirements specified in the appropriate model building code.

1.4 Wood-plastic composites and plastic lumber are produced in a broad range of fiber and/or resin formulations. It is recognized that the performance requirements in this specification are valid for any material or combination of materials used as deck boards, stair treads, guards, or handrails.

1.5 Details of manufacturing processes ~~may be proprietary and~~ are beyond the scope of this specification.

1.6 The values stated in inch-pound units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are mathematical conversions to SI units that are provided for information only and are not considered standard.

1.7 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory requirements prior to use.*

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2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards*:²

- [D9 Terminology Relating to Wood and Wood-Based Products](#)
- [D198 Test Methods of Static Tests of Lumber in Structural Sizes](#)
- [D790 Test Methods for Flexural Properties of Unreinforced and Reinforced Plastics and Electrical Insulating Materials](#)
- [D883 Terminology Relating to Plastics](#)
- [D1037 Test Methods for Evaluating Properties of Wood-Base Fiber and Particle Panel Materials](#)
- [D1413 Test Method for Wood Preservatives by Laboratory Soil-Block Cultures \(Withdrawn 2016\)³](#)
- [D1554 Terminology Relating to Wood-Base Fiber and Particle Panel Materials](#)
- [D1761 Test Methods for Mechanical Fasteners in Wood](#)
- [D1929 Test Method for Determining Ignition Temperature of Plastics](#)
- [D1972 Practice for Generic Marking of Plastic Products \(Withdrawn 2014\)³](#)
- [D2017 Test Method of Accelerated Laboratory Test of Natural Decay Resistance of Woods \(Withdrawn 2014\)³](#)
- [D2047 Test Method for Static Coefficient of Friction of Polish-Coated Flooring Surfaces as Measured by the James Machine](#)
- [D2394 Test Methods for Simulated Service Testing of Wood and Wood-Base Finish Flooring](#)
- [D2565 Practice for Xenon-Arc Exposure of Plastics Intended for Outdoor Applications](#)
- [D2915 Practice for Sampling and Data-Analysis for Structural Wood and Wood-Based Products](#)
- [D3345 Test Method for Laboratory Evaluation of Wood and Other Cellulosic Materials for Resistance to Termites](#)
- [D4000 Classification System for Specifying Plastic Materials](#)
- [D4092 Terminology for Plastics: Dynamic Mechanical Properties](#)
- [D4761 Test Methods for Mechanical Properties of Lumber and Wood-Base Structural Material](#)
- [D5764 Test Method for Evaluating Dowel-Bearing Strength of Wood and Wood-Based Products](#)
- [D6109 Test Methods for Flexural Properties of Unreinforced and Reinforced Plastic Lumber and Related Products](#)
- [D6662 Specification for Polyolefin-Based Plastic Lumber Decking Boards](#)
- [E84 Test Method for Surface Burning Characteristics of Building Materials](#)
- [E108 Test Methods for Fire Tests of Roof Coverings](#)
- [E1354 Test Method for Heat and Visible Smoke Release Rates for Materials and Products Using an Oxygen Consumption Calorimeter](#)

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the [standard's Document Summary](#) page on the ASTM website.

³ The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

F1679 Test Method for Using a Variable Incidence Tribometer (VIT) (Withdrawn 2006)³

G154 Practice for Operating Fluorescent Ultraviolet (UV) Lamp Apparatus for Exposure of Nonmetallic Materials

2.2 *Other References:*

AWPA Standard E1 Standard Method for Laboratory Evaluation for Determination of Resistance to Subterranean Termites⁴

AWPA Standard E10 Standard Method of Testing Wood Preservatives by Laboratory Soil-Block Cultures⁴

2009 International Building Code International Code Council, Inc.⁵

2009 International Residential Code International Code Council, Inc.⁵

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Terminology used to describe WPCs are defined in Terminologies **D9**, **D883**, **D1554**, and **D4092**, Practice **D1972**, and Classification **D4000**.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *center-point load*—a flexure test where the load comes in contact with the test specimen at a location that is ½ the test span.

3.2.2 *guard*—a building component or a system of building components located at or near the open sides of elevated walking surfaces that minimizes the possibility of a fall from the walking surface to a lower level.

3.2.3 *handrail*—a rail intended for grasping by the hand for guidance or support.

3.2.4 *plastic lumber*—a manufactured product made primarily from plastic materials (filled or unfilled), typically used as a building material, which is usually rectangular in cross-section.

3.2.5 *quarter-point loading*—a flexure test where the load comes in contact with the test specimen at two locations, each of which is located at ¼ the span from the specimen load support.

⁴ Available from American Wood-Preservers' Association (AWPA), P.O. Box 361784, Birmingham, AL 35236-1784, <http://www.awpa.com>.

⁵ Available from International Code Council (ICC), 5203 Leesburg Pike, Suite 600, Falls Church, VA 22041-3401, <http://www.intlcode.org>.

3.2.5.1 *Discussion*—

For example, quarter-point loading for a test specimen on a 24-in. (610-mm) span would have two equal loads contact the test specimen each located 6 in. in from the test specimen load support. The distance between the two points of load would be 12 in. (305 mm).

3.2.6 *span rating*—an index number that identifies the test span used in all structural load testing, which is the maximum center-to-center support spacing for the specified end use, and allowable design capacity, in pounds per square foot (lbf/ft² (kN/m²)), determined in accordance with this specification.

3.2.6.1 *Discussion*—

For example, a deck span rating of 1/100 recognizes the deck board for installation perpendicular to the floor joists spaced a maximum of 16 in. (406 mm) on center, and for supporting the load combinations required by the applicable code, which in this case cannot exceed 100 lbf/ft² (4.79 kN/m²).

3.2.7 *third-point loading*—a flexure test where the load comes in contact with the test specimen at two locations, each of which is located at 1/3 the span from the specimen load support.

3.2.7.1 *Discussion*—

For example, third-point loading for a test specimen on a 24-in. (610-mm) span would have two equal loads contact the test specimen each located 8 in. in from the test specimen load support. The distance between the two points of load would also be 8 in. (205 mm).

3.2.8 *wood-plastic composite (WPC)*—a composite made primarily from wood- or cellulose-based materials and plastic(s).

4. General Requirements

4.1 *Sampling*—Samples for testing shall be representative of the population being evaluated. Sampling shall be representative of the possible variations due to changes in raw materials and process variables over time. It is essential to consider batch-to-batch and shift-to-shift variability when sampling actual production. Test specimens shall be selected from several production runs of a

given item. Products shall be sampled at the manufacturing site by an accredited third party inspection agency or testing laboratory. Exceptions to sampling at the manufacturing site, such as at a warehouse or distribution center, shall be documented in the test report.

4.2 *Sample Size*—Selection of a sample size depends upon the property to be estimated, the actual variation in the property occurring in the population, and the precision with which the property is to be estimated. The principles of Practice **D2915** shall be followed. The minimum sample size shall provide estimation of mean values within 5 % in accordance with 3.4.2 of Practice **D2915**.

4.3 *Conditioning*—Prior to testing, all specimens shall be conditioned to environmental conditions appropriate for the intended end use of the product. Alternatively, test specimens shall be conditioned for a minimum of 40 h at 68°F ± 4°F (20°C ± 2°C) and 50 ± 5 % RH. If data show that product properties are not affected by extreme moisture conditions, such as submersion, the material shall be permitted to be tested without special conditioning. When the product is to be subjected to a water soak environment, the test specimens shall be tested within 30 min upon removal from the treatment.

4.4 *Flexural Tests*—Flexural strength and stiffness shall be determined in accordance with principles of Test Methods **D4761** or **D6109**. Alternatively, to assess compliance with performance requirements in its intended installed configuration, the deck boards shall be tested according to the two-span method defined in **Annex A1**. The test specimen cross section shall be the minimum anticipated structural size for the intended end use. The test span shall be that for which code recognition is desired. The specimens shall be loaded at a constant strain rate of 1 % per minute (±10 %). Average time to failure for each test configuration shall be recorded (see Commentary, **X1.2**). A constant strain rate of 1 % per minute is achieved by using a constant rate of test machine crosshead motion, *R*, (inches/minute) computed in terms of the test span, *L*, and the member depth, *d*, by the following equation:

$$R = 0.00185 \times L^2/d \quad (1)$$

For members where the depth (vertical dimension) is varying along the member length, the depth (*d*) shall be taken as the gross member depth at the point of maximum moment.

NOTE 2—Eq 1 is based on the maximum extreme fiber strain at midspan of a horizontally symmetric simple span member. For a product that is symmetric about its horizontal axis, Eq 1 yields the target strain rate at both the extreme tensile and extreme compressive faces. For a product that is not symmetric about its horizontal axis, the Eq 1 strain rate is the average of the strains at these faces. See Commentary for additional information.

NOTE 3—Some wood-plastic composites and plastic lumber exhibit exceptionally large deformations prior to failure in bending. Users are cautioned to take particular care in test machine set-up to accommodate large deflections, both in terms of deflection-measuring devices and support conditions.

4.4.1 *Flexural Strength*—Modulus of rupture (*MOR*) or moment capacity shall be reported for each specimen. Flexural strength shall be calculated from the maximum load achieved or the load at 3 % strain, whichever occurs first.

4.4.2 *Flexural Stiffness*—Apparent modulus of elasticity (*MOE*) or *EI* shall be reported for each specimen. Flexural stiffness shall be calculated from a linear least squares fit of the stress-strain curve over the range of 10 to 40 % of ultimate stress.

4.4.3 The flexural strength and stiffness for deck board, guard, and handrail materials shall be determined in accordance with 4.4 and shall be used to establish a standard baseline performance level for comparison with future production during the required quality control audits.

4.5 *Temperature and Moisture Effects:*

4.5.1 *Temperature Effect*—Testing shall be conducted to verify that allowable span and load ratings are applicable at a range of temperatures expected in service. For purposes of this specification, the lower and upper temperatures shall be -20 ± 4°F (-29 ± 2°C) and 125 ± 4°F (52 ± 2°C), respectively. Flexure tests shall be conducted to failure at the desired span. A minimum of 10 specimens shall be tested at each temperature. The flexural strength and stiffness shall be determined in accordance with 4.4 and the average change in properties between the flexural strength and stiffness of the control flexural specimens and the specimens tested at low and high temperatures shall be calculated as a percentage and reported. The average change in flexural strength and stiffness properties shall be calculated by determining the difference between the control and conditioned values and dividing that difference by the control value.

4.5.2 *Moisture Effect*—Testing shall be conducted to verify that allowable span and load ratings are applicable at moisture conditions expected in service. Flexure tests shall be conducted to failure at the desired span. A minimum of 10 specimens shall be tested at moisture conditions anticipated in service (for example, high humidity, submerged). The average maximum flexural strength and stiffness shall be determined in accordance with 4.4. The average change in properties between the control specimens and those tested at the in-service moisture condition of interest shall be calculated as a percentage and reported. The average change in flexural strength and stiffness properties shall be calculated by determining the difference between the control and conditioned values and dividing that difference by the control value.

4.5.3 *Criteria*—The most restrictive effect (either temperature or moisture) shall be used to adjust the performance rating of deck boards, guardrails, and handrails. For deck boards, the deck board span (or load rating) shall be reduced by the most restrictive effect determined from 4.5.1 or 4.5.2. For guards and handrails, if the most restrictive effect exceeds 25 %, the test loads for the guards or handrails shall be increased by the amount in excess of 25 %.

4.6 *Ultraviolet (UV) Resistance Test*—To determine the mechanical property degrade after UV exposure, a minimum of five (5) full-size or full-thickness specimens shall be exposed to a minimum of 2000 h accelerated weathering in accordance with Specification **D6662** using Practice **G154** or **D2565**.

4.6.1 When testing equipment does not allow either full-size or full-thickness test specimens, coupon specimens removed from the surface of the full-size cross section shall be used. However, when using data generated from coupon specimens, the user must justify the estimation of the impact on the full-size product (see **X1.2**).

4.6.2 A minimum of five (5) exposed and five (5) unexposed test specimens shall be tested in accordance with **4.4**. The surface expected to receive UV exposure in service shall be exposed to the UV light source. The flexure test shall be conducted with the exposed surface in tension. If more than one component is being evaluated (for example, deck boards and guard rail components) and all materials are manufactured from the same materials, then UV testing of only one component is required.

4.6.3 *Acceptance Criteria*—The average change in properties between the exposed and unexposed specimens shall be calculated as a percentage and reported. The average change in flexural strength and stiffness properties shall be calculated by determining the difference between the control and conditioned values and dividing that difference by the control value. Condition of acceptance is the average flexural strength of exposed test specimens and shall be within 10 % of the average flexural strength of unexposed specimens. For deck boards, if the decrease exceeds 10 %, the deck board span (or load rating) shall be reduced by the amount in excess of 10 %. For guards or handrails, if the decrease exceeds 10 %, the test loads for the guards or handrails shall be increased by the amount in excess of 10 % (see **X1.3**).

4.7 *Freeze-Thaw Resistance Test*—To determine the mechanical property degrade after freeze-thaw exposure, a minimum of five (5) specimens shall be subjected to the following exposure cycle. Whenever possible the test specimens shall be prepared using the full cross section of the as-manufactured product. Test specimens shall be submerged underwater (using weights to hold them down, if necessary) for a period of 24 h. The specimens shall then be placed in a freezer at $-20 \pm 4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ($-29 \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$) for 24 h. After being subjected to freezing, the specimens shall be returned to room temperature for a period of 24 h. This process comprises one hygrothermal cycle. The above procedure shall be repeated two more times, for a total of three cycles of water submersion, freezing, and thawing.

4.7.1 A minimum of five (5) exposed and five (5) unexposed specimens shall be tested in accordance with **4.4**. If more than one component is being evaluated (for example, deck boards and guard rail components) and all materials are manufactured from the same materials, then freeze-thaw testing of only one component is required.

4.7.2 *Acceptance Criteria*—The average change in properties between the exposed and unexposed specimens shall be calculated as a percentage and reported. The average change in flexural strength and stiffness properties shall be calculated by determining the difference between the control and conditioned values and dividing that difference by the control value. Condition of acceptance is the average flexural strength of exposed test specimens and shall be within 10 % of the average flexural strength of unexposed specimens. For deck boards, if the decrease exceeds 10 %, the deck board span (or load rating) shall be reduced by the amount in excess of 10 %. For guards or handrails, if the decrease exceeds 10 %, the test loads for the guards or handrails shall be increased by the amount in excess of 10 % (see **X1.3**).

4.8 *Biodeterioration Tests*—Termite and decay testing shall be required for deck board, guard, and handrail products containing wood, cellulosic, or other biodegradable materials.

4.8.1 *Fungal Decay Resistance Test*—Resistance to fungal decay shall be determined in accordance with Test Methods **D2017**, **D1413**, or AWPA Standard E10.

4.8.1.1 *Criteria*—Examination of test blocks shall reveal decay resistance equivalent to that of preservative-treated or the heartwood of naturally durable wood used in identical applications, as measured by visual inspection, and average weight loss.

NOTE 4—This is an accelerated laboratory decay test. Results are subjective and comparisons between tests and materials should be used with caution. However, mean specimen weight losses greater than 5 %, or significantly greater than controls, should be cause for concern.

4.8.2 *Termites*—Test Method **D3345** or AWPA Standard E1 shall be used for evaluation of resistance to termite attack.

4.8.2.1 *Criteria*—Visual inspection of the test specimens shall demonstrate resistance to termite attack equivalent to that of preservative-treated or the heartwood of naturally durable wood used in identical applications.

4.9 *Surface Burning Characteristics*—The flame-spread index of materials used to fabricate deck boards, guards, and handrails shall be determined by testing in accordance with Test Method **E84**.

4.9.1 *Criterion*—Materials shall have a flame-spread index no greater than 200 when tested in accordance with Test Method **E84**.

NOTE 5—Other test procedures may be permitted for determining a flame-spread rating for the material. Depending upon material formulation, other fire performance tests may be required. Additionally, fire performance properties other than flame spread may be important. Test Methods **E1354** or **D1929** may be used to provide an assessment of one or more of the following properties: smoke release rate, mass loss rate, heat release rate, ignition temperatures, and spread of flame.

5. Deck Board Performance Requirements

5.1 *General*—Deck boards are a structural element and shall be tested in flexure to establish a deck board span rating. Because deck board products are often subject to a variety of outdoor environments, the effect of moisture and temperature shall be

determined and used in the determination of the span (or load) rating. In addition to the structural assessments, several other performance measures shall be evaluated, which include tests to determine creep-recovery (5.4), mechanical fastener capacity (5.5), and slip resistance (5.6).

5.1.1 The unadjusted load derived in 5.3.1 shall be reduced by the adjustment factors derived in 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7.

5.1.2 The test loads specified in 5.3.2 shall be increased by the end-use adjustment factors derived in 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7. When the adjustment factors from 4.5 are required, the adjustment factor for MOR (or moment capacity) shall be used for strength criteria, and the adjustment factor for MOE (or EI) shall be used for deflection criteria.

5.2 *Flexural Performance Tests*—Flexural strength can be recorded as either modulus of rupture (*MOR*) or moment capacity. Flexural stiffness can be recorded either as apparent modulus of elasticity (*MOE*) or flexural stiffness (*EI*).

5.2.1 Flexural tests to failure at the span desired shall be conducted in accordance with 4.4. Sample size shall be a minimum of 28 specimens representative of normal production and be of the actual cross-section size for the intended end use. When a stair tread performance rating is desired, a center-point load test shall be also performed.

NOTE 6—Multiple-support conditions may be used for the flexural tests (for example, two-span continuous).

5.2.2 The maximum load, the load at the deflection at $\frac{1}{180}^{\text{th}}$ of the test span, and a description of the failure mode for each test specimen shall be recorded. The average flexural strength and average apparent stiffness shall be calculated and reported in accordance with 4.4.

NOTE 7—When determining the desired span, it is important to consider whether the boards will be installed perpendicular to or at an angle to the supports (joists).

5.3 *Determination of the Unadjusted Allowable Load:*

5.3.1 The unadjusted allowable load for the test span selected shall be calculated from the lesser of the following: (1) the average ultimate flexural strength (from 4.4) divided by a factor of safety of 2.5, and (2) the average flexural strength that results in a deflection of $\frac{1}{180}^{\text{th}}$ of the test span.

5.3.2 Additionally, when deck boards are to be recognized as stair treads, the boards shall also sustain a minimum concentrated load of 750 lbf (3338 N) applied over a $4 \pm 0.08 \text{ in.}^2$ ($2580 \pm 50 \text{ mm}^2$) area at midspan, adjacent to the edge of the deck board. The surface area of contact for the concentrated load point shall be either circular or square. The average stair tread deflection at 300 lbf (1335 N) load shall not be greater than 0.125 in. (3.1 mm).

5.3.3 *Two-Span Adjustment*—When flexural testing is conducted to failure using a simple-span condition as described in Test Methods D4761 or D6109 and the failure mode is flexural collapse or 3 % strain, two-span adjustments for flexural strength and stiffness shall be permitted. If the user intends to take the strength increases for hollow or thin-walled products, a confirming test using the two-span protocol is required to verify that the failure mode is not buckling or crushing at the support. For flexural strength (*MOR* or moment capacity) the increase is 23 %, and for flexural stiffness (*E* or *EI*) the increase is 39 %. The strength increase (*MOR* or moment capacity) is applicable to stair treads only.

NOTE 8—The increases for flexural strength and stiffness in 5.3.3 are based on engineering mechanics for a continuous beam over two spans, where the support conditions are assumed to be pinned connections. Therefore, for these increases to apply, the actual installation of the stair tread should be such that the deck board remains in contact with its supports throughout its intended lifetime.

5.4 *Creep-Recovery Test*—A minimum of three (3) specimens representative of the population being sampled shall be loaded in flexure in accordance with 4.4 to twice the design load for which approval is desired. Prior to loading, the test specimens shall be allowed to equilibrate to the test temperature conditions (for example, $68 \pm 4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ($20 \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$)) and be maintained throughout the experiment. The load is applied for 24 h and the specimens are then allowed to recover with no superimposed load for 24 h. Deflection at mid-span is measured a minimum of four times: (1) prior to the application of load, (2) at 24 h with load on, (3) immediately after the load is removed, and (4) after the 24-h recovery period. Total deflection is the deflection that occurs between time zero and the end of the first 24-h loading period. The recovered deflection is the deflection at the end of the 24-h recovery period minus the total deflection. The percent recovery for each test specimen shall be defined as the recovered deflection divided by the total deflection times 100. The average percent recovery, rounded to the nearest percent, shall be 75 % or greater and reported. For products where the total deflection is less than $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (3.2 mm), the unrecovered deflection shall be less than $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (1.6 mm).

5.5 *Mechanical Fastener Holding Tests*—Conditioning of the deck boards prior to test specimen preparation shall be conducted in accordance with 4.3. Testing of a minimum of five (5) test specimens with each fastener and load direction that the connection must resist, such as lateral, withdrawal, or pull-through, when used to fasten deck boards to the supporting structure, shall be conducted according to Test Methods D1761 or D1037 with nails, screws, or staples, and in accordance with Test Method D5764 for bolts. Connections using proprietary fasteners, which include hidden fastener systems, shall be tested in accordance with Test Methods D1761, D5764, D1037, or any other test procedure approved by the specifying authority that is appropriate for determining the allowable capacity of the connection. The allowable capacities of the fasteners shall be the average ultimate load divided by a factor of safety of three (3.0). Fastener application density for deck boards shall be based on allowable capacities of the fasteners and wind uplift pressures sought for recognition in the evaluation report.