

Fly-Ash Composite Decking

No wood and a Class A fire rating

Composite decking made from recycled ingredients like wood flour and plastic is an environmental success story, as it keeps those materials out of landfills and lasts a long time. But the wood content is an inherent weakness that can make composites susceptible to mold and color fade.

A California company says it's found a way to beat those problems — by eliminating the wood flour. LifeTime Composites manufactures its decking, LifeTime Lumber, by extruding a mixture of fly ash and urethane. Fly ash is a by-product of coal-burning power plants, and the United States produces millions of tons of the stuff every year. It can be recycled into a variety of products, including concrete, bricks, and tile — and now decking.

According to the company, LifeTime Lumber doesn't have to be painted or stained and can be worked with conventional tools. It's available in two versions, one of which has a Class A fire rating. The manufacturer says it's made from 65 percent recycled materials, is chemically inert, and off-gases no volatile organic compounds, all of which help it earn credits under the LEED rating system.

The decking comes in 5/4x6 and 2x6 dimensions, for 16-inch and



24-inch on-center joist spacing, respectively. LifeTime says the material doesn't expand or contract with changes in temperature, although a gap of 1/8 inch is recommended for end-to-end as well as side-to-side spacing.

Like other composites, LifeTime is not rated for use as a structural element. It can be installed with either hot-dipped galvanized or stainless steel screws and also can be nailed. No predrilling is required. Scraps can be discarded in regular municipal waste but should not be burned.

Decking comes in lengths of 12, 16, and 20 feet and in two colors, brown and gray. Standard decking costs between \$2.50 and \$2.70 a lineal foot; fire-rated decking is \$3.20 to \$3.40 per foot. One more bonus: It's about 25 percent lighter in weight than most wood-plastic composites. — S.G. ❖

■ **LifeTime Composites,**
877/285-4338, ltime.com.