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Update: Synthetic Teak Deck Test

After eight months with little change, Tek-Dek is still king.

When we reported on Synthetic Teak Decking Systems (PS July, 2004), we found that all three systems tested—Flexiteek, Tek-Dek, and MarineDeck 2000—gave us good-looking results. And while there were differences in application techniques (and costs), we found that all three systems gave us easy-to-clean deck surfaces. We promised a follow-up report to see how the three products—along with a section of teak plywood—would hold up under actual outdoor conditions.



After eight months of being walked on, rained on, snowed on, and exposed to the sun, Flexiteek (second from left) and Tek-Dek (third from left) appear unchanged. The real teak (far right)—and to a lesser extent MarineDeck (far left)—have lightened after exposure. Black-and-white photos are, unfortunately, less effective than color in illustrating these differences.

We have both good news and bad news. And both are the same: nothing much has changed. The bad news is bad news only in a journalistic sense—no change doesn't exactly make for a gripping story. The good news is that we have three products that are—so far at least—doing pretty much exactly what they're supposed to do.

How We Tested

We mounted panels (roughly 1 foot square) of each decking system on a strip of plywood. We placed the set of panels out-of-doors on a south-facing, unshaded deck and left them there. The panels were exposed to the weather for 24 hours a day for eight months; they were rained on, snowed on and walked on.

In southern New England, where we conducted our tests, 2004 was somewhat of an atypical year. It was cooler than average, with more rain and more snow than are typically encountered in this region. In our experience, plastics and composite products are degraded more by the sun's UV than they are by rain, snow, or cold. Even so, we feel that continuous exposure is a reasonably severe test, and one that is a meaningful predictor of real-life durability.

Periodically, we checked the panels' non-skid and non-staining characteristics. We also checked for embrittlement, and the effects of light sanding to remove scuff marks.

What We Found

The greatest difference we noted at the end of eight months of outdoor exposure was in the appearance of the various products. While Flexiteek and Tek-Dek appeared to be unchanged, the panel of teak plywood has started to do what untreated teak generally does: its original gold/brown surface has bleached out to a whitish gray. The panel appeared as if it had been given a thin coat of whitewash. The MarineDeck panel, derived from cork, also lightened, though not nearly as dramatically as the teak. Both the MarineDeck and the teak panel continued to look good, though neither retained its original color.

Resistance to stains and spills of the three synthetics was, as far as we could tell, unchanged, throughout this time, although the natural teak seemed to be somewhat more susceptible to stains and scuffs.

The non-skid on MarineDeck 2000 was excellent, wet or dry. The skid resistance of Flexiteek and Tek-Dek was very good, both wet and dry. The teak was not as good in this respect, particularly when wet, rating only fair. We observed no signs of embrittlement with any of the products, even in below-freezing weather.

All our samples (including the teak plywood) could be sanded to remove surface scuffing. With Tek-Dek and Flexiteek, the color of the sanded areas was the same as the unsanded areas, making the sanding undetectable. The sanded area on the MarineDeck panel was more noticeable, and it was very noticeable on the teak.

Conclusions

If you like the initial appearance of untreated teak, any one of the three synthetics we tested retained that appearance far better than did the teak plywood panel, with Flexiteek and Tek-Dek excelling in this characteristic. And all three synthetics, as far as we could determine, shrugged off the effects of eight months of outdoor

exposure, though the MarineDeck did lighten slightly in color.

We liked these products when we applied them, and we still like them. In that earlier article, we deemed Tek-Deck our top choice due to its user-friendliness for DIY applications and its resilience to staining and denting, if only by a hair. We've seen no reason to revise that ranking.

Clearly, if we wish to see which one stands up best over time, we're going to have to continue these exposure tests at least until one of them displays some sign of failure. From our observations so far, this will take a long, long time.

Contacts

- Flexiteek Americas, Inc., 954/973-4335, www.flexiteekusa.com
- Tek-Dek Internationa, 604/880-3737, www.tek-dek-international.com
- MarineDeck 2000 (STAZO Marine Equipment), 207/354-0914, www.stazo.nl, www.marquipt.com

www.practical-sailor.com

For questions about your order or subscription,
please email us at: customer_service@belvoir.com

Or call us at: 800/424-7887

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