



# Home Tips®



• CHRISTIAN BUILDING INSPECTORS, INC., 1003 STAR COURT, NORCROSS, GEORGIA 30093, (770) 925-8518 • MARCH 1994 •

## Q & A

### Stairs On Uneven Ground?

*I know how to cut a stair stringer (the piece you nail the stair treads and risers to). But, can you tell me how to cut one when the bottom of the stringer will rest on uneven ground? I want to build stairs from our porch, and the yard slopes away in the location I want to put the stairs.*

It isn't a good idea to have stairs that stop on uneven ground. It's a safety hazard, and in fact, it is against the local building code. You need to provide a flat landing area at least 36" X 36" at the bottom of the stairs. A concrete pad that is 3" to 4" thick is the best because it will provide a solid place to rest the bottom of the stairs on. Once the level pad is in place, you can cut a standard stair stringer.

### Paper Wasps Attacking Decks?

*I seem to have wasps chewing on my cedar deck and siding. How can I get rid of them?*

The wasps are probably paper wasp. They chew the wood to make a paper-mache-like substance for nest building.

Unless you can find and remove their nest, chances are the wasps are there to stay. These wasps can be nesting virtually anywhere (even underground), up to 3/4 of a mile from your house. If you do find the nest (this is a big "if"), you can use any number of aerosol wasp killers to wipe them out. Follow the directions on the label. Also, try killing the individual wasp as you find them chewing on your deck. There may be only a few wasps from the colony that have taken a liking to your deck.

We do have some good news. Wasps die in the winter, so these particular rascals won't be back in the spring, and hopefully, their offspring won't find your deck.

### What Are Concrete Control Joints?

*We are planning to replace our asphalt driveway with concrete and have been told to use control joints. What are they and why do we need them?*

Control joints are used to try to "control" cracking. Concrete slabs expand and contract with changes in temperature and moisture. Freezing and thawing also put stress on a concrete slab. All this movement and stress cause concrete slabs to crack. By putting in a control joint at specific intervals, you're in essence building in a weak spot in the slab. If the slab is going to crack, you want it to happen at the control joint. This eliminates random, unsightly cracks.

Installing a control joint is no guarantee that you will not get cracking in other areas of the slab, but it helps.

### Asphalt Over Concrete?

*Our driveway is starting to wear and look bad. Can we apply asphalt over the old concrete?*

You can if the concrete is solid and does not have large cracks that go completely through the concrete. If you apply asphalt over old concrete that has large cracks, the cracks will transfer to the new asphalt within a year or two. This will be more common in areas of the country where freezing causes the concrete to move.

Because your putting 2 to 4 inches of asphalt over the concrete, you may have a problem with the driveway being higher than your garage floor. This could cause water to flow into the garage. Also, if your driveway is fairly steep, adding a couple of inches of asphalt may be enough to make your car scrape the road when you leave.

But look, hiring someone to bust up the old driveway and haul it off should not cost more than a few hundred dollars. We think it's probably worth it to prevent headaches down the road.

### Lightning Protection?

*Our house has been hit by lightning twice. How can we protect our TV and stereo equipment?*

You can do a number of things to reduce the chances of damage to your electronic equipment in the event of a power surge, caused either by a lightning strike or your power supply.

First, check with your local electric company to see if they sell a surge suppresser that mounts on the main electrical panel, or electrical meter, that will protect your house from lightning-induced power surges. These cost around \$160 installed. Since power surges can also enter your home

