One Method of Installing
PORCH RAILING POSTS

There are almost as many railing styles for porches as there are houses. City code will
generally specify such things as railing height and spindle spacing; but, within those parameters,
rails can be constructed in any number of ways. Thus, they can define the style of a home, in
addition to protecting against accidental falls. Railings are seldom a problem, unless they are
used on a porch that also serves as a roof for the floor below. Then, they are the most frequent
place for a leak to begin.

The most common way of attaching railing posts to the roof practically guarantees a leak. All
too often, they are nailed or screwed right through the roofing, with the nail heads then covered
with a little tar. This may work for a year or so, but eventually the tar dries out, cracks, and
allows water into the room below. Even before that, people may walk out on the roof and lean
on the railings, or hold onto them for security. As the rails are poked and prodded and leaned
upon, they move – and the tar seal on the nail heads can crack and open up.

There is a method for making and attaching
the railing posts that will reduce the chances of a
leak. For each post, nail or screw four pieces of
the same width lumber together to form a hollow
square (see Illustration 1). Then, measure the
inside dimensions of the post. Cut two blocks of
“2 x” material to this size. Locate the place on the
roof where the post is supposed to go, and mark
the spot. Coat the bottom of one of your cut blocks
with silicone caulk. Then, with that caulked side
down, center the block over the spot you marked
and screw it down. Screw the second block to the
top of the first one.

Next, apply silicone caulk to the bottom edge of
the post. Slip the post over the blocks you screwed
to the porch deck. Now, after ensuring that the post
is plumb, screw through the sides of the post into the
blocks to secure it (see Illustration 2). When you put
a cap on this post, there will be virtually no way for
water to get into the roof.

If you feel savvy enough, you can even attach the railings to the sides of the post before
you assemble the pieces together into a square. This assembly makes an attractive and
strong rail design.

Whether you construct the railing yourself or hire a carpenter to do the work, this system will
adapt to nearly every railing style. With this design, you will be insuring yourself against water
leaks through the roof for quite a while.

(continued)
ILLUSTRATION 2: ASSEMBLY

Slip pre-made post over blocks on roof. Screw through the sides of post into blocks.