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The mystery of the black diamonds on tape measures

The black diamonds which appear every $19 \frac{3}{16}$ " on metal tape measures are for spacing I-beam "timbers". Several wood-product manufacturers offer I-beam "timbers" as a substitute for solid lumber floor joists. The diamond marks on our tape rule blades are for spacing these engineered floor joists in new construction.

Because these beams are able to support more weight than their dimensional lumber counterpart, they often have different spacing requirements. Span tables for these beams provide ratings for spacings of 12", 16", $19 \frac{3}{16}$ ", and 24". If you multiply these dimensions by 8, 6, 5, and 4, respectively, you'll find each comes to 96", the length of the plywood panels used for sub-flooring.

Those diamond marks are there for builders who want to take advantage of the great strength of engineered I-beams by using fewer floor joists, with no loss of floor support, where codes allow.