

Safety Cop



On Ladder Safety

Using ladders safely is a year-round concern. Workers falling from improperly used ladders are a major cause of workplace injuries and fatalities.

The Right Ladder

The two most common types are folding stepladders and straight ladders. It's important to choose the right one for the job. Here are some pointers:

- Is the ladder tall enough? Never place a ladder on top of another elevation (such as boxes or crates), or join two ladders together to extend height;
- When using a straight or extendable ladder make sure the side rails are at least 36 inches above the top support point;
- Don't use metal ladders anywhere near overhead power lines;
- Do not exceed the ladder's rated weight limit.

Safety Basics

Always do a "pre-flight check" before ascending a ladder. Look for defects like:

- Missing, damaged, slippery, loose rungs;
- Loose screws and bolts, protruding nails and splinters;
- Steps and side rails that have been shoddily repaired;
- Corroded metal parts, including spreaders on folding ladders.
- Broken wheels on rolling ladders.

Use the ladder as the manufacturer intended. Never use ladders horizontally to form working surfaces, platforms or scaffolds.

- Don't use a folding stepladder as a straight ladder (don't lean it against a wall).
- Don't stand on the top step of a folding ladder, or climb higher than the fourth rung from the top of a straight or extension ladder.
- Don't use a ladder's utility shelf as a step.
- Face the ladder when ascending and descending, and make sure that you have a good grip on both of the side rails.

More Considerations

When leaning a straight or extension ladder against a wall or other stable surface, use the 4-to-1 rule. For each four feet of vertical height, bring the base out one foot. If you are accessing a roof, the ladder should extend at least three feet above the point of contact, and should be secured or tied off to prevent slipping.

Consider the location where the ladder will be used. If it's placed near an active walkway, close off the passageway and place adequate warning signs nearby. OSHA regulates the use of portable ladders and scaffolds in their standard for Walking and Working Surfaces. It mandates that ladders not be placed in front of doors opening toward the work area unless the door is blocked open, locked, or guarded. While ensuring your own safety, don't create a hazardous condition for others.

Portable rolling ladders should be equipped with wheel brakes to prevent rolling when the ladder is stepped on. The same is true for rolling office stepstools. On the ladder, be guided by your belt buckle: never reach over the side rails further than your buckle. If you can't reach something, get down and move the ladder.

Remember, ladders expose us to a potentially fatal fall hazard if not properly used. Leave the aerial stunts to acrobats and trapeze artists.

Safety & Risk Management

