

Step Up to Ladder Safety

The ladder is one of the most familiar and commonly-used pieces of equipment on the construction—site—so much so that workers may neglect to follow ladder safety procedures and end up falling. A worker doesn't have to fall far off a ladder to suffer a serious or fatal injury.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics preliminary figures for 2010 show that there were 129 fatalities due to falls from ladders. And in 2011, Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) issued 3,244 ladder violations alone, one of OSHA's most frequently-cited standards.

Your responsibility as the employer is to make sure your workers optimize their safety by getting proper training in safety procedures for the selection, use, and care of ladders.

Fall injuries typically occur due to:

- The ladder not matching the job.
- The ladder not being inspected or maintained.
- The ladder not being set up correctly.
- The worker not climbing or descending the ladder properly.

Ladders come in varying styles, sizes, and materials depending on the type of work to be performed. Workers must become familiar with ladder types and choose the right ladder for the job. Once the correct ladder is selected, it should be inspected before each use to make it sure it is not damaged. If any defects are found, it should be tagged and taken out of service.

Prior to setting up the ladder, workers should check the placement surface to see that it's solid, level, and able to support the ladder load. A straight ladder should be long enough so that the side rails extend above the top support point by at least 36 inches. The ladder must be placed against a solid support, near the work area, and be angled properly with the base out from the wall or edge of the upper level by about one foot for every four feet of vertical height. *Workers should never try to increase the height of a ladder by standing it on other objects or by splicing two ladders together.*

If the ladder is portable it should be tied or secured against a structure to prevent accidental movement by vehicles or pedestrians. The area around the top and base of the ladder should be kept clear. If possible, ladders should be kept away from doorways or walkways, unless they can be protected by barriers.

Prior to climbing the ladder, workers should check their shoes and the ladder steps or rungs for oil, grease or mud, then wipe them clean. While climbing or descending, they should face the ladder, grasp the side rails with both hands, and make sure their feet are placed firmly on ladder rungs or steps. Any light, compact tools or materials should be attached to the worker or to the ladder, but raising or lowering an awkward load should be done with a hand line.

Most portable ladders are designed to hold only one person at a time; two people may cause the ladder to fail or be thrown off balance. Workers should never lean out from a ladder beyond their belt buckle. If something is out of reach, they should know to descend the ladder and move the ladder. Finally, portable ladders should never be used sideways as platforms, runways or scaffolds.

Emphasize to your workers the importance of good ladder safety for their physical well-being and the financial well-being of your company.

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