

Toolbox Talk

Portable Ladder Safety

Portable ladders are very common on construction sites. But don't let their simplicity fool you, the vast majority of injuries on site are from ladder falls. It is important to select the correct ladder for your task, and respect the rules for that ladder as well.

Portable Ladders - can be moved around the construction site and many different types and sizes.

Fixed Ladders - Permanently attached to a building for regular access.

Site Built Ladders – Usually made of wood, for a specific access point.

10 Safety Tips

1. Never step on top of an A Frame Ladder. The high center of gravity can cause it to easily tip, and there is nothing to grab onto.
2. Maintain 3 points of contact when climbing and descending: 2 hands + 1 foot or 2 feet + 1 hand.
3. Set up extension ladders at a 4:1 pitch. For every 4' of wall height, the base of the ladder should be 1' away. A 20' wall, the base of your ladder should be 5' away. If it is more than 5, the ladder could slide out, if it is less the ladder is too steep and could tip as you climb higher.
4. Ladders should extend 3' above the platform you are entering and exiting. (i.e. getting on a roof) This gives you something to hold onto as you move around the ladder.
5. Do not lean past the side rails of the ladder, your belt buckle should stay within the rails.
6. Inspect your ladder before each use for damages
 1. Broken or missing rungs
 2. Damaged side rails
 3. Missing or damaged feet
7. Check the area around where the ladder will be set up to ensure there are no overhead hazards (electric or phone lines, bee hives, loose/slippery materials)
8. Ensure the ground is safe for a proper set up. Level, no debris or sharp objects, clear away snow/ice/loose stone.
9. Do not use a step ladder in a partially closed position, or leaned against a wall. Step ladders are self-supporting and work best when fully opened and locked.
10. Do not set up a ladder where others could easily bump into it. Set up barricades as needed to keep traffic away.

Weight Ratings

As important as the set-up is, choosing the correct ladder for the task is equally important. Keep in mind the user and the tools/material that will be on the ladder. A weak ladder will result in collapse, which usually comes with injury.

Questions For You

1. How often do you inspect your ladders?
2. Have you ever been on a roof with a ladder that was a bit too short? Pretty scary when you cant find it.
3. What weight rating are the ladders you have? Is it enough?