Using Ladders Safely



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Many types of ladders are available, and each is designed to do a certain kind of work. There are stepladders made for industrial, commercial, and household use. There are single ladders, sectional ladders, extension ladders and rolling ladders. Ladders may be made of wood, fiberglass or metal, and they may be portable or fixed.

And it's a good thing there are so many options, because using a ladder is a safer alternative to using a makeshift climbing device, like a chair, or an improvised work platform, such as an old box. However, using a ladder incorrectly can result in serious, even fatal injuries.

What's the Danger?

Broken bones and head injuries are common results of falls involving ladders. In addition, workers can be shocked or electrocuted when a ladder contacts an energized line, cable, or piece of equipment.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are 10 ways to work safely when using almost any portable ladder.

1. Make sure you use the best ladder for the job. It should be the right design and constructed of the right material.
2. Do not use the ladder for any purposes other than those recommended by the manufacturer.
3. Never use a metal ladder or wire reinforced wood ladder when working near a live electrical conductor.
4. Remember, your weight and the weight of materials and tools on the ladder should not exceed the recommended load limit.
5. Examine the ladder for any defects or damage. Check for looseness between the rungs and the siderails and check moving parts and bindings for too much play. Check for split or cracked wood, corroded metal, and frayed ropes.
6. Wooden ladders should not be painted because this can hide defects; instead, they should be coated with a clear lacquer.
7. If you find a problem with the ladder, immediately take it out of service so it can be repaired or destroyed. Tag it "Do Not Use."
8. Position the ladder correctly, the way it was designed to be used. Place the base on a solid, non-slip surface. Both siderails should be supported at the top

unless the ladder is designed to be used with a single support attachment.
9. A straight ladder should be set up using the four-to-one rule. For every four feet that goes up in height, the base of the ladder should be placed one foot away from the wall.
10. Use both hands while climbing. Do not carry tools or materials in your hands; carry small tools in a belt and use a hoist for larger items.

Pro Tip: Ladders are also common in our homes, used for construction, painting, pruning and cleaning projects. Follow these same tips to use them safely.

Final Word

It doesn’t take long for you to select the right ladder for a job, set it up properly, and use it safely.