



Ladder Safety

Portable ladders are a simple and effective means for safe climbing except for one major problem. Workers sometimes find portable ladders so easy to use that they neglect normal precautions and safety rules. The result, too often, is an accident.

Almost all ladder accidents can be avoided by following the three basic rules of ladder safety:

- No ladder is safe unless it is the right type and right size for the job
- No ladder is safe if it is missing rungs, if its rungs or rails are defective, if it is poorly built, or if it is in a weakened condition
- No ladder is safe unless the person using it takes common sense precautions.

Using the right type of ladder makes the job safer. For example, don't use a stepladder to do the job of a straight ladder by leaning it against a support.

Heavy construction jobs call for heavy ladders, not light household types. Metal ladders must not be used in the vicinity of exposed electrical circuits or power lines, where they may come in contact.

The right length is important, too—neither too long nor too short. Stepladders are safest if they're 10 feet or less in length, and they should never be longer than 20 feet. In construction work, extension ladders can be used to reach up to 44 feet, but, for greater heights, scaffolds should be used. Splicing two ladders together is never safe.

A ladder should always be examined before it is used to be sure there are no defects that make it unsafe to use. (The reason a ladder should never be painted is that the paint could conceal significant defects.)

A ladder is unsafe to use if side rails are cracked or split or if there are sharp edges or splinters on cleats, rungs, or side rails. Check also for missing, broken, or weakened cleats, rungs, or treads by placing the ladder flat on the ground and walking on it. If a defective ladder cannot be repaired, it should be disposed of permanently.

Once the ladder has been checked and found safe, set it at an angle of about 75° with the floor or ground. The distance from the wall to the foot of the ladder should be about equal to 1/4 of the ladder's total length.

After setting the ladder in place, check it for firm and level footing. To prevent slipping, nonslip points or safety shoes are recommended. But, if this is not practical, the ladder should be secured firmly by lashing it with rope or some other suitable line.

The ordinary straight ladder is not built to support more than one person at a time. In going up or down, always face the ladder and grasp the side rails with both hands.

Never carry tools or materials in your hands when going up or down the ladder. Instead, put them in a sack that hangs from a strap over your shoulder or use a bucket and rope to raise and lower them.

Don't lean a ladder against an object that might move, and never lean it against a window sash. If you must work near or on a window, fasten a board securely across the top of the ladder to give a bearing on each side of the window.



Always stay below the top three rungs unless you have a firm handhold or a safety belt. Even then, you should hold on with one hand while working.

Be sure you keep moving the ladder as needed to reach new areas to be worked. Never overreach, push, or pull the ladder while working on it. Never straddle the space between the ladder and another object or try to work in a high wind. Any of these actions could upset you and the ladder.

If you're working in front of a door that opens toward the ladder, the door must be blocked open, locked, or guarded. In any other situation in which a person or vehicle may bump into the ladder, get a helper to stand guard. If you can't, then be sure to rope off the space around the ladder.

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Some points to remember:

- Always inspect a ladder before using it.
- Outdoors, don't work on a ladder if it's very windy.
- When going up or down, face the ladder. Don't hurry. Take one step at a time, and hold on with at least one hand.
- Don't overreach or try to reposition the ladder while you're on it. Instead, get down and move the ladder to a better working position.
- Don't work on any of the top three rungs of a ladder unless you have a firm handhold or a safety belt.
- Secure the ladder against slipping before you try to use it.
- Don't ever use a metal ladder near live wires or parts.
- When a ladder is not in use, store it under cover, horizontally, with supports to prevent sagging.
- Don't let it lie on the ground where heat or dampness may weaken it.

Ladders can be a great help on the job. They're simple to use and get you where you need to be. Although ladders are uncomplicated devices, they can be dangerous. It's important to know and follow ladder safety guidelines.

Choose the Right Ladder for the Job

- Make sure your ladder's strong enough and long enough for the job.
- Check the ladder's duty rating and don't exceed its limits. Type I, an industrial ladder, holds 250 pounds. Type II holds up to 225 pounds. Type III, the household ladder, holds up to 200 pounds.
- Remember to consider the weight of your tools when selecting a ladder.
- If you work around electrical wires or power lines, use a wooden or nonconductive fiberglass ladder, not metal.
- Never connect two short ladders to form a long one.



Inspect Your Ladder Before You Use It

- Check for loose or bent rungs, cracked side rails or bent or missing parts.
- Make sure the spreaders can be locked in place when opened.
- Metal ladders should have plastic or rubber feet and step coverings.
- Check for oil and grease on the rungs which could cause you to slip.
- Replace missing parts and tighten loose hardware.
- Avoid repairing major structural damage. Instead, get a new ladder.
- Make sure the steps are wide enough for you to spread your feet for balance.

Set Up Your ladder Carefully

- Place your ladder on a firm, level- surface with its feet parallel to the wall it's resting against.
- Use the 4-to-1 ladder rule: Set the base of your ladder 1 foot away from the wall for every 4 feet of ladder height.
- In busy areas, use a barricade to prevent collisions.
- Lock nearby doors that could open toward you.
- Always tie off your ladder. Lash straight ladders
- at the top and bottom.
- The top of a straight ladder should extend 3 feet beyond its resting point.
- Carry your ladder vertically, or use two people- one at each end.

Climb Cautiously

- Face the ladder when you climb up or down.
- Hold on to the side rails with both hands.
- Carry only necessary tools on your belt.
- Use a rope to raise heavier equipment.
- Never overreach.
- Use the "belt buckle" rule. Always keep your body centered between the rails.
- Always wear a safety harness if you're climbing more than 6 feet off the ground.
- Allow only one person on a ladder at a time.
- Wear shoes with nonskid soles.
- Make sure your hands are dry and free of grease.
- Never step on the top two rungs of a ladder.
- Never use a ladder for anything other than its intended purpose.

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