How to Select and Inspect a Ladder

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, forgetting or failing to pick the right ladder and/or inspect the ladder you pick, puts your safety in jeopardy.

What’s the Danger?

Each year thousands of people are injured while using ladders. Anyone who uses the wrong ladder for a job or uses one that is defective is courting trouble. Consider this story…

An employee was climbing a 10-foot ladder to access a landing that was nine feet above the adjacent floor. The ladder slid down, and the employee fell to the floor, sustaining fatal injuries. Although the ladder had slip-resistant feet, it was not secured, and the railings did not extend three feet above the landing.

How to Protect Yourself

The first step in doing any job correctly and safely is pre-planning. In the context of ladder safety, that means selecting the ladder that’s right for the job and ensuring it’s safe to use.

How to Choose the Right Ladder

Ladders must be of the right:

✓ **Length**: It’s important to note the length of the ladder is not the same as the maximum
working length or highest standing level.

✓ **Strength**: For example, some lightweight ladders are only designed
to hold a maximum of 200 pounds.

✓ **Type**: Does the job require a stepladder or an extension ladder? Maybe you
don’t need a ladder at all. Perhaps what you really need is a scaffold?

✓ **Material**: Take a minute and think about the job you’re going to do. Will you
be working around electrical power sources? If so, do not use a metal ladder.

How to Inspect a Ladder

You’ve picked the right ladder for the job; now it’s time to inspect it. Here are seven things to check:

1. Your shoes. Don’t wear leather soles because they’re often slippery and unsafe. Check your shoes are free of mud, grease, oil and snow. And if you’re working with electrical equipment, make sure there are no nails or screws lodged in the soles of your shoes.
2. The ladder’s shoes. Ladders should have non-skid safety feet and be in satisfactory condition. Do not use a ladder whose safety feet are loose or worn.
3. The whole ladder, including the siderails for flaws and cracks, and the rungs for looseness. A twisted or distorted aluminum ladder (especially a long one) is extremely hazardous and should never be used.
4. The siderails and rungs for sharp edges. These can usually be filed down. But if extensive repairs are required, they should always be done by a qualified service person.
5. The pulleys and extension locks on extension ladders to ensure they’re functional and in proper working order. Ropes

should be replaced if they show signs of aging or wear.

6. The whole ladder for dents, rust or corrosion. Some chemical compounds such as potassium hydroxide, hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid and ammonia are known to corrode and weaken aluminum over time.
7. The whole ladder for loose rivets and fastenings and other signs that the ladder needs replacing.

Final Word

Don’t let the unsafe use of ladders be your downfall! Choose the right ladder for the job and inspect it for defects. And remember, these are good safety tips to follow when clearing out the gutters at home this weekend.