Ladder Setup and Safety

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Ladders are just another tool much like a screwdriver or pliers. People run the risk of becoming complacent with the use of ladders. It is particularly critical for jobsite safety to choose the right ladder for the job and climb the ladder with care amongst other precautions.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

DANGERS ASSOCIATED WITH LADDERS

The use of ladders presents many hazards. Injuries involving ladders frequently cause permanent disability.

The hazards associated with ladders include:

- Falls from ladders
- Struck by falling ladders
- Struck by materials falling from ladders
- Tripping over ladders (erect or lying on floor)
- Lifting heavy ladders
- Striking persons or objects when carrying ladders
- Contact with electrical equipment

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

GENERAL PRECAUTIONS FOR SAFE USE OF LADDERS

- Ladders must be maintained free of oil, grease, and other slipping hazards.
- Wooden ladders must not be painted as this could hide flaws or damage of the ladder.
- Ladders must not be loaded beyond their manufacturer's rated capacity.

- Ladders must be used only for the purpose for which they were designed.
- Non-self-supporting ladders must be used at an angle where the horizontal distance from the top support to the foot of the ladder is approximately one-quarter of the working length of the ladder.
- Fixed ladders must be used at a pitch no greater than 90 degrees from the horizontal, measured from the backside of the ladder. Above 8’, ship’s ladders should be installed with slip resistant steps and handrails as required.
- Ladders must be used only on table and level surfaces unless secured to prevent accidental movement.
- Ladders must not be used on slippery surfaces unless secured or provided with slip- resistant feet to prevent accidental movement. Slip-resistant feet must not be used as a substitute for the care in placing, lashing, or holding a ladder upon slippery surfaces.
- Ladders placed in areas such as passageways, doorways, or driveways, or where then can be displaced by workplace activities or traffic must be secured to prevent accidental movement or a barricade must be used to keep traffic or activities away from the ladder.
- The area around the top and bottom of the ladders must be kept clear.
- The top of a non-self-supporting ladder must be placed with two rails supported equally unless it is equipped with a single support attachment.
- Ladders must not be moved, shifted, or extended while in use.

BASIC LADDER TIPS

Choose the Right Ladder

Using the wrong ladder can be dangerous. Think about the task at hand, choose the right size and style, and be sure to follow the directions on the ladder before you climb.

Firm Foundation

No matter what kind of ladder you're using, place the base on a firm, solid surface and avoid slippery, wet or soft surfaces.

Use Care on the Climb

When people use ladders frequently at work or at home, they run the risk of becoming complacent. Make sure every time you step on a ladder you are mindful of the task at hand, have reviewed the labels on the ladder and confirmed that the ladder is in good working condition.

Inspection

- Always check a ladder before using it. Inspect wood ladders for cracks and splits in the wood. Check all ladders to see that steps or rungs are tight and secure. Be sure that all hardware and fittings are properly and securely attached. Test movable parts to see that they operate without binding or without too much free play. Inspect metal and fiberglass ladders for bends and breaks.
- Never use a damaged ladder. Tag it "Defective" and report it to the boss so that it may be removed from the job.

Setup Procedure

- Place ladder feet firmly and evenly on the ground or floor. Make sure the ladder is sitting straight and secure before climbing it. If one foot sits in a low spot, build up the surface with firm material.
- Do not try to make a ladder reach farther by setting it on boxes, barrels, bricks, blocks or other unstable bases.
- Brace the foot of the ladder with stakes or place stout boards against the feet if there is any danger of slipping.
- Never set up or use a ladder in a high wind, especially a lightweight metal or fiberglass type. Wait until the air is calm enough to insure safety.
- Never set up a ladder in front of a door unless the door is locked or a guard is posted.
- Use Safety shoes on ladder feet whenever there is any possibility of slipping.

Ladder Climbing and Standing

- Keep the steps and rungs of ladders free of grease, oil, wet paint, mud, snow, ice, paper and other slippery materials. Also clean such debris off your shoes before climbing a ladder.
- Always face a ladder when climbing up or down. Use both hands and maintain a secure grip on the rails or rungs
- Never carry heavy or bulky loads up a ladder. Climb up yourself first, and then pull up the material with a rope.
- Climb and stand on a ladder with your feet in the centre of the steps or rungs.
- Do not overreach from a ladder, or lean too far to one side. Overreaching is probably the most common cause of falls from ladders. A good rule is to always keep your belt buckle inside the rails of a ladder. Work as far as you can reach comfortably and safely, then move the ladder to a new position.
- Never climb onto a ladder from the side, from above the top or from one ladder to another.
- Never slide down a ladder.

FINAL WORD

Ladders can be used safely if they are given the respect they deserve. If one requires assistance in setting up a ladder, ask a co-worker, boss or supervisor for that assistance. Prior to the use of any ladder, make sure it is in good condition; that you are in good condition to climb and the ladder is the right ladder for the job.