Use Extension Ladders Safely

How This Affects You:

Every year thousands of employees are injured in falls from ladders. Many die. And many of the dead victims fell from heights we think of as "safe."

First, always choose the right material, strength and weight rating. For example, metal ladders should never be used near an electrical power source, but a wooden ladder may not support you and your tools. In that case, try fiberglass.

Do a safety inspection, using a checklist if necessary. Never use a ladder with broken, missing, or loose parts. Check for oil or grease on the rungs. Ensure that ropes, pulleys, and locks are in good condition and the feet have clean, sturdy non-slip soles. Your shoes should also have clean non-slip soles, and a definite heel to prevent your foot from slipping through the ladder.

Using the ladder:

- Carry a ladder balanced on your shoulder. Use two people for longer ladders.
- Look around. What's overhead? Beside? In front? Behind? See any electrical lines?
- Set the base of the ladder one foot out from the structure for every four feet of height. Don't over-extend the sections. Use a rope or strap to secure the ladder so that it won't slip or fall.
- Have a lookout, and post warning signs. If you have to work in a doorway, block it and lock it.

Climbing a ladder:

- To climb a long ladder, try a "bearclimb", which lessens bouncing. Move the right hand and foot together, and then the left hand and foot. It takes a bit of practice.
- Stop climbing when you are at least three rungs from the top.

Working on a ladder:

- Keep your hands free for climbing; secure tools in a tool belt and hoist larger tools in an approved container after you have reached your work height. Carrying heavy or bulky objects up a ladder can cause you to lose your grip and balance.
- Use proper fall protection if you need both hands for the task. Always climb down and move the ladder if you cannot easily reach your work.
- Allow only one person at a time on the ladder. There should be no backseat drivers with this job.
- When the job is finished, store the ladder horizontally to prevent unauthorized use.

Don’t fall for short cuts! Follow these tips for safe use of extension ladders on the job and at home.