Wobbly Ladders Should Be Scrapped

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Workers sometimes take chances with ladders, failing to remove worn or damaged ladders from service. This could cause serious, even fatal, injury.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Ladder mishaps frequently result in serious consequences; many workers are killed in falls. Many electrocutions involve a ladder contacting a power line.

Example

Dan tried to "make do" with a ladder that was too short to extend above the rooftop, so he was unable to balance himself as he stepped off the ladder. He fell and broke his back.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Inspect a ladder before each use. The rungs, side rails and feet must be in good condition, and every nut, bolt and rivet must be secure.
- If you find defects, remove the ladder from service immediately and tag it defective. Get it repaired if possible. If it isn't repairable, tag it for destruction so the ladder can't be used again.
- Use the correct length ladder, extending above the top of the roof at least three feet (.9 meters). Don't use the full length of an extension ladder; the two sections must overlap. Follow manufacturers' guidelines.
- Use the correct type for the work – straight, extension or stepladder – rated for the weight it will hold.

- Don’t reach beyond an arm’s length from the side of the ladder.
- Note that wood can split and break with age and wear. Metal ladders can buckle under too much weight. Metal must not be used for electrical work. The ladder must resist corrosion from moisture and chemicals present in the work area. Fiberglass is used for many ladder designs.
- Set up the ladder correctly. If the ground surface is uneven, dig a hole for the lower leg rather than resting the high leg on a block. The surface should be solid and stable so the ladder will not slip.
- Use the four-to-one formula. For every four feet (1.2 meters) the ladder reaches up the wall, it should be one foot away from the wall. So, if you have a ladder touching the wall at the 12-foot level, the ladder’s feet should be three feet away from the wall. This gives you a safe angle of 75 degrees. If the angle is greater, the ladder will not be as strong. If the angle is less, the ladder could tip over backwards.

FINAL WORD

Your life may depend on the condition of the ladder you use. Remember this when you choose a ladder for the job.