

Northwestern  
Portable Ladder Safety  
Environmental Health and Safety

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## I. Purpose

This program provides guidance on the selection, inspection, safe usage, and care of portable ladders to protect those from the hazards associated with their use.

## II. Scope

- A. This program applies to staff, faculty, students, and contractors who perform tasks utilizing portable ladders on campus property.
- B. For the purpose of this program, portable ladders include step stools, mobile ladder stands, and mobile ladder stand platforms.
- C. This program does not apply to fixed ladders (i.e., permanent) and scaffolding, which are covered in the [Northwestern Fall Protection Program](#).

## III. Responsibilities

- A. **Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)**
  - i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
  - ii. Review and revise this program, as necessary.
  - iii. Provide training (see **Section V – Training**).
  - iv. Provide consultation and guidance, as necessary and upon request, to ensure compliance with this program.
- B. **Schools and Units**
  - i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
  - ii. Ensure employees complete all required training (see **Section V – Training**).
  - iii. Ensure the care, selection, usage, and storage of portable ladders are in accordance with this program and manufacturer’s guidelines.
  - iv. Immediately remove damaged or defective portable ladders from service.
  - v. Monitor employees’ and students’ need for additional or refresher training, based upon assigned duties, observed work practices, changes to the worksites, or changes to this program.
  - vi. Contact EHS for guidance and technical assistance, as necessary, to ensure compliance with this program.
- C. **Portable Ladder Users**
  - i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
  - ii. Complete all required training (see **Section V – Training**).
  - iii. Properly select, inspect, use, handle, and store ladders in accordance with this program and manufacturer’s guidelines. Refer to the [Portable Ladder Inspection Guidelines](#) and [Safe Work Practices](#).
  - iv. Immediately report damaged or defective portable ladders to supervisors or EHS, and discontinue use.
  - v. Prohibited from altering or repairing portable ladders.
  - vi. Wear appropriate and assigned personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly.
- D. **Contractors**
  - i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
  - ii. Ensure subcontractors adhere to the requirements of this program.
  - iii. Ensure employees complete all applicable training, as required (see **Section V – Training**).
  - iv. Responsible for supplying and using their own portable ladders.

- v. Prohibited from using Northwestern portable ladders, except in extenuating circumstances with authorization from Northwestern, including EHS.

## IV. Requirements

### A. General

- i. Reasonable efforts should be made to avoid portable ladder use with alternative solutions (e.g., portable stairs, platforms, utilizing a light bulb changing pole), when feasible.
- ii. Portable ladders are to be used only as intended and designed, as specified by the manufacturer and this program.
- iii. Adequate fall protection is required when using a portable ladder (e.g., extension ladder) to gain access to an elevated work area, such as a platform or roof, where fall hazards are present, in accordance with the [Northwestern Fall Protection Program](#).

### B. Approval

All portable ladders used on Northwestern property must be of an approved type by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

### C. Labeling

- i. Portable ladders must have all labels in place as provided by the manufacturer, including but not limited to usage guidelines, weight limitations, and warning or danger statements.
- ii. Labels must be legible, undamaged, and unaltered.
- iii. Labels must indicate the size, type or duty rating, maximum working length, highest standing level, number and total length of sections (if applicable), model number or name, manufacturer's name and location, date of manufacturer, and ANSI standard compliance information.

### D. Inspection

- i. Portable ladders must be inspected when originally purchased, received, and put into service, and by the user prior to each use. Refer to the [Portable Ladder Inspection Guidelines](#) and the manufacturer's guidelines on inspecting and maintaining portable ladders.
- ii. Portable ladders found to be defective or damaged must be tagged "Dangerous: Do Not Use This Ladder" and immediately removed from service until repaired or replaced.

### E. Electrical Hazards

- i. Users must implement appropriate safety controls to prevent any contact—direct or indirect via portable ladders, tools, conducive objects, or personal contact—with energized or uninsulated electrical circuits, conductors, wiring, or power lines.
- ii. The use of metal portable ladders (e.g., aluminum) or portable ladders with metal components (e.g., wood ladders with side-rail metal reinforcement wires) around electrical sources of energy, or while performing electrical work, is prohibited.
- iii. Metal portable ladders must have a label indicating they are not to be used near electrical equipment or energy sources.

**F. Maintenance**

- i. Adhere to the manufacturer's recommended guidelines for maintenance.
- ii. Field repairs and modifications to portable ladders are prohibited.
- iii. Do not attempt to straighten a bent or bowed portable ladder.
- iv. Do not paint portable wood ladders as the paint could hide defects.

**G. Storage**

Portable ladders must be stored in areas free of hazards, away from heat, fire, moisture, direct sunlight, and chemicals, and in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines.

## V. Training

**A. General Requirements**

- i. Schools, units, and contractors are responsible for ensuring users are properly trained and proficient in the selection, inspection, use, handling, storage, and hazards associated with using portable ladders. Portable ladder training is required:
  - a) Before users are initially assigned a task involving the use of a portable ladder.
  - b) Whenever there is a change in assigned duties, worksite conditions, or hazards to which a user has not been previously trained.
  - c) If there are observed inadequacies in a user's knowledge or execution of safe portable ladder use.
- ii. Online [Ladder Safety](#) training must be completed annually by staff, faculty, and students who use portable ladders.
- iii. Contractors are responsible for providing adequate training to their personnel.

**B. Specialty Portable Ladders**

Faculty, staff, and students whose activities involve the use of specialty ladders, such as platform ladders, combination ladders, or articulating ladders, must be provided with additional instruction and/or training on inspection and safe usage by a competent person prior to use. Contact EHS for guidance and assistance.

**C. Recordkeeping**

- i. Faculty, staff, and student training records will be maintained by EHS in myHR Learn and kept for the duration of employment, plus 1 year.
- ii. Contractors are responsible for maintaining training records in accordance with applicable standards, and must be available upon request.

## VI. Regulatory Authority and Related Information

Northwestern and contractors will comply with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and ANSI standards, and any other applicable codes and standards, including:

American National Standards Institute (ANSI) ASC A14 – Ladder Standards

[National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\) Ladder Safety App](#)

[Northwestern Contractor Safety Program](#)

[Northwestern Fall Protection Program](#)

[Northwestern Personal Protective Equipment Program](#)

[Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\) 29 CFR 1910.23 – Ladders](#)

## VII. Contact

For questions, contact Environmental Health and Safety at [ehs@northwestern.edu](mailto:ehs@northwestern.edu).