

## Portable Ladder Safety

### Spring forward

Winter is coming to an end and the first day of spring is right around the corner. March is National Ladder Safety Month, and also the kick-off to the spring cleaning season. This is a time for cleaning, painting, and other maintenance activities, many of which require the use of portable ladders.

Portable ladders are one of the most common and important tools you can have in the workplace. However, if improperly used, portable ladders can also be very dangerous or even fatal. Prior to using a ladder, you should know how to select, inspect, and use it to keep you and others around you safe.

### Don't be a statistic!

According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 500,000 people are treated for ladder-related fall injuries and over 300 people die from ladder falls each year. In fact, most fatal falls are from heights of 10-feet or less. At Northwestern, there have been 35 ladder-related injuries over the past 10 years, costing the university \$886,575.62.

### Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

**Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review commonly used ladders in your workplace and discuss how they can be used safely.

**Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

**Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

### Selecting the right ladder

Conduct a job hazard analysis and determine if a portable ladder is the best piece of equipment for the task. Identify the highest height you'll need to reach and the surface on which the ladder will be used. Consider the environment you will be working in and look for equipment that might interfere with your job. If working around electricity or near overhead power lines, ensure you select a ladder, such as fiberglass, to avoid electrocution.

Always verify that the load capacity on the safety label is within the weight you intend to put on the ladder. If there is no label, do not use it!

### Give it a good look

Once you've selected the right ladder, you'll need to inspect it carefully prior to use. Test and inspect all moving parts for correct operation and look for broken or missing rungs, cracked side rails, corrosion, or other faulty components. If you find any damage or defects, immediately remove it from service until repaired or replaced.

### Ladder safety tips



figure 1

- ❖ Always place portable ladders on firm, level surfaces
- ❖ Apply the 4:1 rule when using straight and extension ladders – the base of the ladder must be 1-foot away from the wall for every 4-feet high
- ❖ Never stand on the top rung of a ladder
- ❖ Maintain **3 points of contact** at all times – see figure 1
- ❖ Never use a folded step ladder by leaning it against a wall
- ❖ Relocate the ladder when necessary to avoid over-reaching which could cause loss of balance
- ❖ Remove materials from the ladder before moving it
- ❖ Never carry large or heavy objects up or down ladders
- ❖ Always face the ladder when going up or down

### Preparation and training are key

Learn more: Complete *Ladder Safety* training at [learn.northwestern.edu](http://learn.northwestern.edu).

### Safety at home

Falls from ladders at home occur more frequently than you might think. In fact, the American Journal of Preventative Medicine discovered that 97.3% of all ladder injuries happen at home. Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe while working on ladders:

- ✓ Never leave a ladder unattended, especially around children
- ✓ Use the same safe practices you do at work as you do at home
- ✓ If you have to access the roof be sure that the ladder extends at least 3-feet above the point of contact and it is secured

### For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at [gwen.butler@northwestern.edu](mailto:gwen.butler@northwestern.edu) for details.