

Portable Ladder Safety

Don't Fall Short of a Safe Day!

Portable ladders are one of the most common and important tools you can have at home and at the workplace. They are quite handy when it comes to reaching areas for cleaning, painting, and maintenance. In this month's Spotlight on Safety issue, we will discuss how to select, inspect, and use portable ladders to keep you safe.

Any fall can be serious and could easily result in a painful and incapacitating injury, even from a low height. In fact, most ladder deaths are from falls of 10 feet or less! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that falls are a leading cause of death and nearly half of those falls have been from ladders. Among workers, 20% of fall injuries are from ladders and among construction workers, this number jumps to 81%.

Ladder Selection Guidance

When considering which ladder to use, determine where it will be used (indoors or outdoors), what type of surface it will rest on, and the highest height you'll need to reach. If you are working around electricity or near overhead power lines, ensure you select a ladder that will not conduct electricity. Consider the environment



you'll be working in and look for equipment that might interfere with your job. Think about how much total weight will be on the ladder (yourself and any equipment needed) and read the safety label (Figure 1) to confirm that it is within the rating. If there is no label on the ladder – don't use it!

Broken Ladders Can Be Replaced – You Can't

After selecting the correct portable ladder for your task, you'll need to inspect it carefully prior to use. Test and inspect all the moving parts for proper operation and look for damage. If you find any defects, the ladder must not be used until repaired. Keep in mind that a ladder that has been tipped over or dropped must not be used until it has been inspected and determined safe for reuse. If a ladder cannot be repaired, it must be destroyed.

Get a Step Up on Ladder Safety!

- Place portable ladders on firm, level surfaces
- Never stand on the top of a ladder
- Always go up and down facing the ladder, 1 step at a time
- Do not use a folded step ladder by leaning it against a wall
- Maintain 3 points of contact at all times
- Wet or metal ladders (Figure 2) conduct electricity and must not be used when working on or near electrical equipment
- Relocate the ladder to avoid over-reaching, which could result in a loss of balance
- Never carry large or heavy objects up or down the ladder
- Carry small tools or materials in your clothing or attached to a toolbelt
- Remove tools and materials from the ladder before attempting to move it
- **Do your part:** Complete *Ladder Safety* training at learn.northwestern.edu

Figure 2



Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant to your work. With your team, review commonly used ladders in your department and discuss how they apply to your work.
- **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.

Safety at Home

Did you know? The American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that 97% of ladder accidents happened at home. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that more than 90,000 people receive emergency room treatment from ladder-related injuries every year. Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe:

- Lead by example. Children are always watching and learning from us; using a ladder correctly and safely will encourage them to do the same
- Never leave a ladder unattended, especially when children are present
- Use the same safe practices you do at work as you do at home
- Although not recommended, if you have to climb onto the roof be sure the ladder extends at least 3 feet above the point of contact and is secured

For Additional Information

Please contact [Gwen Butler](#), Director of Environmental Health and Safety, at 847.491.4936 with any questions.