

Ladder and Scaffold Safety

Ladders and scaffolds are designed to quickly and easily provide access to elevated work areas to perform maintenance activities such as changing light bulbs, painting, and repairs. Understanding the hazards and safe work practices will ensure that you avoid a fall and potential injury while working from ladders or scaffolds.

Portable Ladders

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 20% of fall injuries among workers involve ladders. To prevent injuries, Northwestern's [Portable Ladder Safety](#) Program provides guidance on the inspection, safe usage, and care of portable ladders to protect you from the hazards associated with their use. Below are the common mistakes that contribute to ladder accidents, and the methods of prevention.

- 1. Selecting the wrong ladder or equipment.** Choosing the right tool for the job is essential. Avoid using a ladder when other equipment and safe means of access is available, such as a mobile elevated work platform (MEWP). Ensure that you don't exceed the ladder weight capacity and that the ladder is tall enough to safely reach the work area.
- 2. Using worn or damaged ladders** can fail while in use and result in a fall and injury. Always inspect ladders before use. Ladders with visible damage such as bent rungs, cracks, and missing parts must be removed from service. Northwestern's Portable Ladder [Inspection Guide](#) is available to ensure ladders are thoroughly inspected.
- 3. Incorrect use of ladders.** Never use a ladder in any other way than what the manufacturer intended. For example, standing on the top rungs of a self-supporting ladder may result in a loss of balance, resulting in a fall. Refer to Northwestern's Portable Ladder [Safe Work Practices](#) for tips on safe usage.
- 4. Incorrect ladder placement.** Place ladders on firm, level surfaces to prevent them from falling over; never use ladders near doors that may be opened.
- 5. Carrying items** while climbing accounts for 50% of all ladder-related accidents, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Never carry objects or loads that could cause a loss of balance and always maintain 3-points of contact – either two hands and a foot, or two feet and a hand.

Following safe work practices and inspecting ladders prior to use will ensure your safety while working at heights. Complete [Ladder Safety](#) training and visit the American Ladder Institute's [National Ladder Safety Month](#) website to learn more.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review commonly used ladders and scaffolds 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.

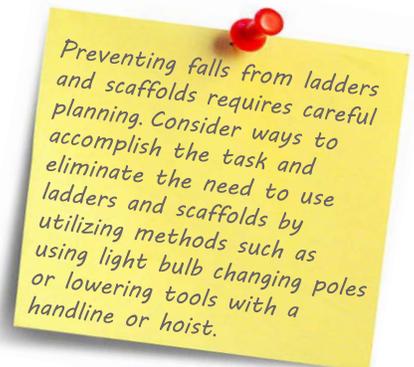
Safety at Home

While you may not be using scaffolds at home, there is a good chance you own and use a portable ladder for such tasks as changing light bulbs, home repairs, and clearing gutters. It is important that you follow the same safe work practices you do in the workplace when using a ladder at home, and consider these safety tips to protect yourself from injury:

- ✓ Wear protective footwear with slip-resistant soles and heels to avoid slips on the ladder rungs which may result in a fall.
- ✓ Never stand on the top two rungs of a stepladder, and the top three rungs of an extension or straight ladder. This will ensure your balance while working at heights.
- ✓ If you plan to use the ladder outside, do not use it in windy or inclement weather to avoid slippery conditions or imbalance which may result in a fall.

For Additional Information

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



Scaffolds

According to the BLS, scaffold-related accidents result in 60 deaths and 4,500 injuries every year on average. To avoid accidents, Northwestern's [Fall Protection](#) Program provides guidance to protect individuals from falls associated with working at heights, including work on scaffolds. Key program scaffold requirements include:



Baker scaffold

- Scaffolds must be erected, moved, dismantled, and altered under the supervision of a competent person, who also inspects it before use
- Fall protection, such as gates and guardrails, is required on all scaffold platforms greater than 4-feet in height
- Toeboards, tool tethering, and barricading drop zones below the scaffolds is required to provide falling object protection

Learn more: Complete [Scaffold Safety](#) training
Report all injuries on the Risk Management [website](#) or by calling 847.491.5582