

Northwestern

Portable Ladder Safety

Environmental Health and Safety

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I. Purpose

This program is intended to provide guidance on the inspection, safe usage, and care of portable ladders to protect individuals from the hazards associated with their use.

II. Scope

- A. This program applies to staff, students, and contractors who perform tasks utilizing portable ladders.
- B. For the purpose of this program, portable ladders include mobile ladder stands and platforms.
- C. This program does not apply to fixed ladders, which are covered in Northwestern's [Fall Protection](#) program.

III. Responsibilities

- A. **Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)**
 - i. Review, audit, and revise this program annually or anytime deemed necessary.
 - ii. Provide online training to applicable Northwestern departments.
 - iii. Provide additional training as needed to aid in program compliance.
 - iv. Provide guidance and technical assistance as needed.
- B. **Departments and Units**
 - i. Designate individual(s) to ensure compliance with this program.
 - ii. Ensure the care, selection, usage, and storage of portable ladders in accordance with this program and manufacturer's guidelines.
 - iii. Immediately remove damaged or defective portable ladders from service.
 - iv. 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.
 - v. Coordinate with EHS to ensure all employees and students receive portable ladder safety training.
 - vi. Contact EHS for guidance and technical assistance as needed.
 - vii. Report all incidents (e.g., injuries, property damage, near misses) to EHS.
- C. **Portable Ladder Users**
 - i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
 - ii. Successfully complete all required training as outlined in **Section V**.
 - 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.
 - v. Report all incidents (e.g., injuries, property damage, near misses), hazards, and unsafe working conditions to supervisors.
 - vi. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment correctly.
- D. **Contractors**
 - i. Adhere to the requirements of this program.
 - ii. Responsible for supplying and using their own portable ladders.
 - iii. Prohibited from using Northwestern portable ladders.
 - iv. Ensure employees are trained, applicable to the work being performed and portable ladder type(s) used.

IV. Requirements

A. General

Departments, units, users, and contractors are encouraged to identify and utilize alternative solutions instead of using portable ladders, when possible (e.g., light bulb changing pole).

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 and labels must be legible.
- ii. 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 American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard compliance.
- iii. Usage guidelines and other warning statements (e.g., warning, caution) from the manufacturer must also be in place on the portable ladders in specific locations depending on ladder type.

D. Inspection

- i. All portable ladders must be inspected when originally purchased, received, and put into service, and by the user prior to use. Refer to the Portable Ladder Inspection Guidelines (see **Appendix 1**) and the manufacturer's specifications for guidance 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. Take proper safety measures to avoid portable ladder or tool contact with electrical circuits, wiring, or power lines.
- ii. Take all necessary measures to prevent any contact or possible contact with an energized, uninsulated circuit or conductor in order to avoid electrical shock or short circuit.
- iii. 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.
- iv. Metal portable ladders must have a label indicating to not use 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

Departments and units are responsible for ensuring faculty, staff, and students are properly trained and proficient in the selection, inspection, use, handling, storage, and hazards associated with using portable ladders.

B. Requirements

Portable ladder training is required:

- i. Before a faculty or staff member or student is initially assigned a task involving the use of a portable ladder.
- ii. Whenever there is a change in assigned duties, worksite conditions, or hazards to which the faculty or staff member or student has not been previously trained.
- iii. If there are observed inadequacies in a faculty or staff member's or student's knowledge or execution of safe portable ladder use.

C. Online Training

- i. Portable ladder training is available [online](#) through myHR Learn.
- ii. Departments and units are responsible for providing EHS current staff and faculty lists to ensure they are registered for training.
- iii. Departments and units with students who use portable ladders (e.g., theaters) are responsible for ensuring students complete the online training prior to ladder use.

D. Refresher Training

Portable ladder refresher online training is required annually.

E. Specialty Portable Ladders

Departments and units with faculty, staff, and/or students whose work activities involve the use of specialty ladders, such as platform ladders, combination ladders, or articulating ladders, must provide additional instruction on inspection and safe usage by a competent person prior to use. Contact EHS for guidance and assistance with specialty portable ladders.

F. Recordkeeping

Training records are maintained in Northwestern myHR Learn.

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:

[OSHA 29 CFR 1910.23 – Ladders](#)

[Northwestern's Fall Protection Program](#)

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

ANSI ASC A14 – Ladder Standards

VII. Contact

For questions, contact Environmental Health and Safety at ehs@northwestern.edu.