



Accident Prevention!

Ladder Safety, Watch Your Step

by

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I fell off a 32- foot ladder yesterday, good thing I was on the bottom rung!

We use them all the time: stepladders, straight ladders, and extension ladders. They are a great construction tool that we use every day and take for granted. However, it is no laughing matter, ladders account for an average of 90,000 hospital emergency room visits and 700 occupational deaths per year. Most, if not, all of these accidents could have been avoided if proper attention to equipment and climber training were provided.

Common Ladder accidents are entirely preventable. Ladder accidents can come from a wide variety of issues, but the majority are caused by the following four. Follow these prevention tips for and your ladder accidents could almost be eliminated.

1. Selecting the Wrong Type of Ladder

Like everything else, choosing the right tool for the right job can make a big difference when it comes to ladder safety. When selecting an appropriate ladder, look at the maximum weight limit. If the climber exceeds the ladder weight limit, it could break and cause the user to fall and be injured. Also, consider the right ladder height. If ladders are too short for a specific task, workers will improvise and place the ladder on something to extend its reach or will stand on the top rung to gain the necessary height. Both scenarios are extremely dangerous and can result in serious injuries.

2. Using Worn or Damaged Ladders

Don't use old, worn, or damaged ladders. After a couple of years of stress of being climbed up and down on, ladders can break down. Damaged ladders are extremely dangerous and can easily break while being used and cause serious injuries. To protect yourself from damaged or broken ladders, make sure to thoroughly inspect each ladder before using it. Look for: loose or missing rungs or cleats; loose nails, bolts, or screws; cracked, broken, split, dented, or badly worn rungs, cleats, or side rails; broken or missing spreaders on stepladders; corrosion of metal parts. If any damage is found, attach a "DO NOT USE" tag do not use the ladder until it has been either safely repaired to the manufacturer's specifications or it has been properly disposed of and replaced by a new one.

3. Incorrect Use of Ladders

The leading cause of ladder accidents by far is human error. Using a ladder in any other way than what the manufacturer intended it to be used is a big no-no. Never lengthen or alter a ladder in any way.

While using a ladder always maintain 3 points of contact. Keep both hands free so you can grip the rails or rungs firmly with the ladder to ensure stability. Avoid carrying heavy or clumsy articles up or down a ladder. Use a hand line, tool belt, or material bucket.

4. Incorrect Placement of Ladders

Use care in placing ladders. When setting up an extension ladder, make sure that it is positioned on the ground level and firm. The base of the ladder should be one foot from the supporting structure for every four feet of height between the base and the point where the ladder rests on the supporting structure. If the distance at the base is less than one-fourth of the height, the ladder will be pitched so steeply that work cannot be done comfortably or safely. Remember that OSHA requires safety feet on all extension ladders. Ladders should never be placed in front of a door that is not locked, blocked, or guarded. Use a helper and have them support and secure the base while the ladder is being used is good practice. If the ladder cannot be held by someone else, make sure it has appropriate footing to prevent slippage. The feet of the ladder can be staked if you are using a ladder outside and no one is available to support the feet of the ladder. Also, never attempt to reach for something while on the ladder. It is much safer to relocate the ladder, and then climb back up. Always face the ladder, whether ascending or descending.

When using a stepladder remember the following safety precautions. Never use a stepladder as a straight ladder. Never use a stepladder unless it is fully extended with the spreaders completely opened and locked. Stepladders should not be used on a sloping surface unless the ladder is being held or is otherwise secured. Never stand on either of the top two steps of a stepladder.

Falls from ladders can be deadly. Play it safe, check it out before your climb. For more information on ladder safety, read the warning and instruction labels on the ladder. You can also consult OSHA Standard 29 CFR 1926.1050 - 1060.

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