

Ladder safety

Inspect a ladder like a pro!

Ladder inspections should be performed by a “competent person,”—someone able to identify workplace hazards and who has the authority and the resources to fix them. Here’s what to look for:

- Ensure bottom feet are unbroken and slip-resistant pads are in place.
- Inspect all rungs, rails, shelves, spreaders, and rung locks. Nothing should be cracked, bent, missing, loose, or rusted.
- Secure all bolts and rivets.
- Check for foreign material on ladder, like oil or grease.
- All labels should be in place and readable.
- Tag ladders “out of service” until repaired or discarded.

It’s easy to fall off a ladder, because they’re everywhere—at both work and home—and we use them for everything from cleaning gutters to getting items off of high shelves. So, it’s not surprising that about 20 percent of workplace falls involve ladders, and around 81 percent of all fall injuries requiring an emergency room visit are related to ladders.

Despite this, some workplaces expect employees to use a ladder without any training or information. This brief overview of ladder safety makes a great starting point for general ladder training. Remember to review issues specific to your location—and provide hands-on ladder training. There’s no substitute for actual experience.

Selecting a ladder

Ladders should be selected based on how they will be used. Light duty ladders may work for changing a light bulb at home, but have no place on a construction site. Here’s other considerations:

Pick the right material

- Wood | electrically nonconductive, but can be heavy and can rot if wood is untreated
- Aluminum | unsafe around electricity; lightweight and corrosion-resistant
- Fiberglass | strong, lightweight, and electrically nonconductive, but can be expensive

Load limits

- Designed for the weight it will hold, including worker and equipment
- All ladders must have a duty rating sticker:
 - IAA:** Special duty - 375 lbs.
 - IA:** Extra heavy duty - 300 lbs.
 - I:** Heavy duty - 250 lbs.
 - II:** Medium duty - 225 lbs.
 - III:** Light duty - 200 lbs.

(Continued)



Using a ladder

DON'T:

- "Walk" a ladder by rocking it
- Use a step ladder as a straight ladder
- Carry tools in your hands
- Climb using bracing on back of ladder
- Use a broken ladder
- Stand on top cap or step, or on top three rungs of an extension ladder
- Move someone else's ladder without their knowledge
- Have more than one person on a ladder
- Use a ladder if you are light-headed, dizzy, on medication, fatigued, or otherwise impaired

Setting up a ladder

- Find a stable surface, and level out uneven ground.
- Secure ladders to prevent movement.
- Allow no debris or clutter around ladder.
- Open ladders all the way, and always put locking mechanism in place.
- Lock or guard door if ladder blocks a doorway.
- Never place ladders on boxes, barrels, or other materials to make it taller.
- Never use other items (like boxes, milk crates, or chairs) as ladders.
- Keep ladder free from mud, grease, or other substances.
- Consider traffic around ladder and act to protect the set-up.
- Check for hazards during set-up, such as power lines, nails, beams, or sharp edges.

Using a ladder

- Face the ladder when ascending, descending, or performing work.

- Maintain 3 points of contact (both feet and one hand or both hands and one foot).
- Climb the ladder holding the rungs, not the side rails.
- Climb completely past the landing before stepping over.
- Stay centered using the "belt buckle rule" – keep your belt buckle between the side rails

Storing a ladder

- Store your ladder in a well-ventilated area.
- Secure ladders to prevent tipovers or tripping using cords, straps, wall brackets, or racks.
- Don't store materials on ladders.

Maintaining a ladder

- Performed by a "competent person" (see sidebar on page 1 for definition)
- Clean and lightly lubricate moving parts.
- Replace damaged parts, including labels.

Transporting a ladder

- Lift ladder using your leg muscles.
- Carry ladder close to your body.
- Balance ladder on your shoulder.
- Position ladder so top is above your head and bottom is near the ground.
- Set ladder down when opening and closing doors.
- If two people carry a ladder, they should be on the same side.

