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Use Ladders the Right Way

What do you do when your job is over your head? You get a ladder, of course. When it comes to basic workplace equipment, it does not get much simpler than the ladder. Because ladders are so simplistic, many people overlook their potential hazards. Yet falls account for more than 15% of workplace injuries and deaths. Many of these falls are from ladders and may have been prevented if a few basics had been followed.

Here are some tips for the safe use of ladders:

- ◆ Use the right ladder for the job. A stepladder might be required for lower areas where it is difficult to use a straight ladder. An extension ladder might be needed for a higher point.
- ◆ Examine the ladder for defects and damage. Wooden ladders should be coated with a clear shellac, not with paint because it can disguise defects. Check for loose rungs, cracked rails, rust, corrosion, insecure bolts, damaged fittings and missing feet. Do not use a damaged or defective ladder, and do not leave it for the next person to use. Instead, tag it so it can be repaired or replaced.
- ◆ Handle and store ladders with care to prevent damage. Store them in a covered area so they will not be damaged by moisture and excessive heat and cold. Keep them away from corrosion-causing chemicals. Don't drop ladders or handle them roughly.
- ◆ Keep the ladder away from electrical circuits. Never use a metal ladder around electrical installations. It can conduct electricity to your body and cause electrocution.
- ◆ Place the ladder with the feet one-quarter of its working height away from the base of the structure. If the ladder touches the structure four feet off the ground, the base of the ladder should be one foot away from the building.
- ◆ Make sure both of the side rails are resting on the top support.
- ◆ The top should be tied off or otherwise secured.
- ◆ Have someone hold the base of the ladder to steady it.
- ◆ If the ladder is in a traffic area, place barricades around it to prevent collisions.
- ◆ Check your footwear before climbing a ladder. Boots should be fastened. Soles should be made of a non-slip material and free of mud, ice, or grease.
- ◆ Only one person should climb the ladder at one time.
 - ◆ Face the ladder when climbing up or down.
 - ◆ Keep the weight of your body between the side rails, and do not lean out from the ladder.
 - ◆ Don't stand any higher than the third rung from the top of the ladder.
 - ◆ Do not carry tools or materials in your hands as you climb a ladder. Use a tool belt for small items, and hoist up larger objects.
 - ◆ Stay off ladders when conditions are unsafe – in the dark, in wet or windy weather and during lightning storms.
 - ◆ Be sure to use a ladder when you need it. Don't use chairs, workbenches or other makeshift supports for climbing.



Ladders are extremely useful devices, but they are involved in many serious accidents. Be aware of the hazards and use ladders the right way.