Portable Ladder Safety

Falls from portable ladders (step, straight, combination and extension) are one of the leading causes of occupational fatalities and injuries.

• Read and follow all labels/markings on the ladder.

• Avoid electrical hazards! – Look for overhead power lines before handling a ladder. Avoid using a metal ladder near power lines or exposed energized electrical equipment.

• Always inspect the ladder prior to using it. If the ladder is damaged, it must be removed from service and tagged until repaired or discarded.

• Always maintain a 3-point (two hands and a foot, or two feet and a hand) contact on the ladder when climbing. Keep your body near the middle of the step and always face the ladder while climbing (see diagram).

• Only use ladders and appropriate accessories (ladder levelers, jacks or hooks) for their designed purposes.

• Ladders must be free of any slippery material on the rungs, steps or feet.

• Do not use a self-supporting ladder (e.g., step ladder) as a single ladder or in a partially closed position.

• Do not use the top step/rung of a ladder as a step/rung unless it was designed for that purpose.

(continued on reverse)
• Use a ladder only on a stable and level surface, unless it has been secured (top or bottom) to prevent displacement.
• Do not place a ladder on boxes, barrels or other unstable bases to obtain additional height.
• Do not move or shift a ladder while a person or equipment is on the ladder.
• An extension or straight ladder used to access an elevated surface must extend at least 3 feet above the point of support (see diagram). Do not stand on the three top rungs of a straight, single or extension ladder.
• The proper angle for setting up a ladder is to place its base a quarter of the working length of the ladder from the wall or other vertical surface (see diagram).
• A ladder placed in any location where it can be displaced by other work activities must be secured to prevent displacement or a barricade must be erected to keep traffic away from the ladder.
• Be sure that all locks on an extension ladder are properly engaged.
• Do not exceed the maximum load rating of a ladder. Be aware of the ladder’s load rating and of the weight it is supporting, including the weight of any tools or equipment.

For more information:

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U.S. Department of Labor
www.osha.gov (800) 321-OSHA (6742)