

Loss Control Services – 5 Minute Safety Topic

26M: *Ladder Safety* “Ups and Downs!”

Ladders are vital for getting many jobs done. They tend to be easy to use which means they may be taken for granted. People often fall off ladders, resulting in injuries that can range from bruises to broken bones. Occasionally, the result is death. Falls account for almost 13 percent of workplace deaths and over 16 percent of workplace injuries; ladders are involved in many of those accidents. Following a few simple safety procedures will help prevent ladder related accidents.

1. Choosing the right ladder for the job is extremely important.

Type: The height at which work will be performed should determine what type of ladder — from a step ladder to an extension ladder — is necessary.

Length: Choose a ladder that is the appropriate length for the job in order to minimize reaching or working from an unsafe position.

Material: Ladders can be made of wood, metal, or fiberglass. If there is a chance of contacting electricity, don't use a metal ladder or a wood ladder with metal reinforcements.

Strength: Make sure you check the ladder's duty rating and weight limit to ensure it can support the total amount of weight that will be applied, including tools and personal protective equipment.

2. Ladders differ in size, shape, and material but there are several common safety tips that apply to ladders of all types. Implementing these tips will reduce your risk of injury.

- **Apply the three-point rule:** Keep at least both feet and one hand or both hands and one foot on the ladder at all times.
- Ladders should be inspected before each use for loose or damaged rungs, steps, rails, braces, or nonslip feet.
- If damage is found that may affect safety, the ladder must be tagged immediately and removed from service.
- Wear shoes with non-slip soles.
- Place all ladder legs on solid, level ground or on a stable base.
- Climb facing the ladder with your body centered between the rails. Keep your balance. Do not overreach!
- Attach tools or materials to the ladder or to yourself. Do not try to carry materials up a ladder.
- Protect the base from traffic. If a ladder must be placed in front of a door, make sure the door is locked or guarded.
- Raise and lower heavy loads with a hand line or hoist.
- Never attempt to "walk," "hop," or laterally move a ladder while standing on it.
- Only one person should be on a ladder at a time.

One other safety hint: It is best to have two people carry a ladder. If, however, you have to carry one by yourself, balance the center on your shoulder. Position it so the front end is above your head and the back end is near the ground but not hitting the ground – watch where the projecting part of the ladder is in relation to obstacles.

3. There are specific tips for different styles of ladders. Be sure to follow the safety advice for the type of ladder you are using.

Step ladder

- Fully open step ladders to enable the spreader to lock.
- Do not use the top of the step ladder as a step or work platform.
- Do not use the bracing on the back legs of a step ladder for climbing.

Straight or extension ladder

- Place the upper end of the ladder against a solid wall or structure that will support the weight of the ladder and the climber.
- When using the ladder to gain access to a high place, be sure the top of the ladder extends at least three feet above the support point.
- Do not stand on the top three rungs – use them as hand holds.
- Use the 4:1 rule: For each four feet of distance between the ground and the upper point of contact (such as the wall or roof), move the base of the ladder out one foot.
- Make sure the non-slip feet of the ladder are firmly and evenly planted.
- When using an extension ladder, place the ladder in a vertical position before raising the extension.
- Assemble extension ladders so that the sliding upper section is on top of the base.

And, do not use a chair, box, table or other makeshift device in place of a proper ladder or stepstool – the odds of a fall are greatly increased and such incidents are 100% preventable.

