

Ladder Safety

Summary

If a ladder is used inappropriately, is damaged or the person using it does not take appropriate care an accident may occur.

In Australia, during the 2011 – 2012 years, over 1500 people were hospitalised as a result of a fall from a ladder. ⁽¹⁾



Description

Ladders are used in aged care centres or client's homes to clean areas out of reach, to clean fans or to change light bulbs. It is important to note what your organisation's policy is around using a ladder in your job, as some organisations will only permit a limited number of staff who have had ladder safety training to use a ladder.

If a ladder is used inappropriately, is damaged or the person using it does not take appropriate care an accident may occur.

A report from Safe Work Australia revealed that ladders were the most common cause of falls injuries and fatalities. "In the 8 years from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2011, 37 workers died as a result of falling from a ladder." ⁽¹⁾

A fall from only 1 – 2 metres can result in serious injury or death. Injuries can include fractures, spinal cord damage and brain injury.

Other ladder injuries can occur when a metal ladder comes in contact with a power line resulting in electrocution.

Some people are prone to vertigo, this is where they become dizzy and feel like the room is spinning. A person who suffers from vertigo should not use a ladder as the risk of losing control and falling may be greater. Other people have a fear of heights so it is not advisable for these people to use a ladder in case they lose control and fall.

Ways to use a ladder safely

- Ensure that the ladder you are using is rated for your weight.
- Make sure the ladder rungs are all sound with no cracks.
- Place the ladder close to the item you are lifting down or reaching.
- Look up – make sure the ladder is not going to hit power lines.
- Make sure the ladder is on stable ground.

- Ensure a straight ladder has non-slip feet and is secured at the top to prevent it sliding sideways.
- If the ladder is fitted with spreader bars make sure these are used to prevent the ladder from slipping apart, if the spreader bars are missing, loose or damaged - do not use the ladder.
- Ensure the ladder extends at least 1 metre above the level being accessed.
- Where required make sure there is another person available to 'spot' you and hold the ladder steady.
- Keep one hand on the side rail of the ladder at all times, ensure you have three points of contact whenever climbing or descending the ladder e.g. two feet and one hand or two hands and one foot.
- Never over-reach on a ladder – climb down and reposition the ladder if you can't reach something easily.
- Do not stand on the top two rungs of a ladder; if you can't reach without using the top two rungs, you need a taller ladder.
- Do not place a ladder in front of an unlocked door where someone can walk through and knock the ladder.
- Do not 'lean' a step ladder against a wall or other surface as it may slip out from under you.
- Carry any tools in a tool belt or have someone pass them to you once you are in place.
- If you have any concerns about working at heights or become dizzy at heights, do not use a ladder; inform your Supervisor.

Definitions

Step ladder: a short folding ladder with flat steps and a small platform at the top.

Straight ladder: straight ladders and extension ladders require something to lean against and are used by propping up against some sort of support such as a wall or a tree.

Links and References

<http://www.cultureofsafety.com/safety-tips/ladder-safety/>

<http://toolboxtalks.coffeecup.com/assurance/LadderAccidentCauses.pdf>

<http://www.workplaceaccess.com.au/falls-tragedy-continues-averted/>

Quiz Questions & Answers

Question 1: What should you do if something is just out of easy reach while you are on the ladder?

Answer: Climb down and reposition the ladder if you can't reach something easily

Questions 2: What does it mean to have three points of contact when climbing a ladder?

Answer: Two feet and one hand or two hands and one foot.

Questions 3: What should you do if you get dizzy at heights?

Answer: Do not use the ladder; inform your Supervisor.

Question 4: Why shouldn't you place a ladder in front of an unlocked doorway?

Answer: Someone can walk through and knock the ladder.

