

LADDER SAFETY

Where would today's do-it-yourselfers be without our trusty ladders? If we humans were only eight to ten-feet tall, we could get along nicely without them for most jobs (although we'd have a heckuva time finding chairs and beds to fit our bodies). But we're not, so ladders are often a necessity. They're indispensable when scraping, painting, cleaning gutters, installing ceiling fans or lighting fixtures, working on the roof and a host of similar "around-the-home" tasks.

- Most of us remember what we first learned about ladder safety:
- Always open a folding ladder completely before climbing onto it.
- Be sure all locks on extension ladders are fully engaged.
- Always face the ladder when climbing up or down.
- Don't use electric tools on wet or metal ladders.
- Keep ladder rungs and steps free of dirt, grease and oil.
- Always try to have a "helper" available to hold the ladder when you're climbing.

Here are some additional safety tips we may not be so familiar with:

- Always extend an extension ladder another three feet beyond the work edge and secure it with a rope, if possible, to keep it from slipping.
- Always keep your body centered when working on a ladder to avoid tipping it from side-to-side.
- Use a ladder hook when working on a steep roof. This hook attaches to the ladder's rungs and hooks over the roof's peak.
- Keep one hand on the ladder at all times whenever possible to help maintain your balance while working.
- Place an extension ladder one-fourth as many feet *out* as it is extended *up*. For example, if your ladder is extended up 20 feet, be sure the bottom is out a minimum of 5 feet from the structure.
- Be sure the "feet" of a ladder are on firm, level ground prior to climbing. NEVER set the feet in mud, sand or soft ground. When using an extension ladder, be sure BOTH ladder feet are firmly planted.
- Use a rope or line to haul materials or tools up to your workplace rather than attempting to carry these items up the ladder with you while climbing.
- When using an extension ladder, face the upper sections of the ladder outside and overlap the mating sections by a minimum of 3 feet for maximum rigidity.
- Never stand above the fourth rung from the top of an extension ladder or the second step from the top of a stepladder.
- Using a closed stepladder as an extension ladder can cause it to slip out from under you.
- Always be sure you're mentally and physically up to climbing a ladder before doing so. If you're afraid of heights, taking drugs or drinking alcoholic beverages, don't climb ladders.
- Never climb on the back side of a stepladder.
- Be careful not to lean to one side of a ladder while working or over-reach, as this could cause you to lose your balance and fall.
- NEVER try to re-position a ladder while you're on it by "hopping" or other techniques, as this could tip the ladder and cause personal injury. ALWAYS get off the ladder before moving it.

Choosing the best ladder for the job

Ladders are available in three basic materials and five “ladder ratings”, as follows:

Aluminum Ladders are lightweight, strong and very affordable. They resist corrosion when stored outside, but are not recommended for use around electrical lines.

Fiberglass Ladders are also lightweight and very strong. They are a bit more costly than aluminum ladders and are better suited for work around electrical lines, since they are non-conductive.

Wood Ladders are electrically non-conductive (when dry and clean) and are the least expensive form of stepladder. Wooden extension ladders can be very heavy and difficult to control. Wood ladders will rot if left out in the weather.

Ladder Ratings

Today’s ladders are rated for load capacity, as follows:

- **TYPE III** ladders are *Light Duty Ladders*, rated to hold up to 200 lbs.
- **TYPE II** ladders are *Medium Duty Ladders*, rated to hold up to 225 lbs.
- **TYPE I** ladders are *Heavy Duty Ladders*, rated to hold up to 250 lbs.
- **TYPE IA** ladders are *Extra Heavy Duty Ladders*, rated to hold up to 300 lbs.
- **TYPE IAA** ladders are *Special Duty Ladders*, rated to hold up to 375 lbs.

Storing and maintaining ladders

Between jobs, ladders should be stored horizontally on supports to prevent sagging. This is especially true for wooden ladders.

- Before using a ladder, check to be sure all fastenings are tight and all movable parts are lightly oiled for ease of operation.
- Check to be sure rungs and steps are clean and free of grease and dirt.
- If the rubber feet on an extension ladder are missing, replace them.
- If your extension ladder is equipped with a raising rope, be sure it is in good condition and that all pulleys are functioning properly.