Ladder Safety

As soon as you set foot on a ladder's first rung and leave the ground, gravity goes to work. Ladder safety begins from the ground up.

Start with a good foundation
- Proper ladder setup will help prevent slips and falls. Place the base on a firm, solid surface. Avoid slippery, wet, or soft surfaces. If you must put the ladder on a soft surface, place a board under the ladder's feet to provide firm footing.
- Make sure the top of the ladder has firm support as well. Never lean a ladder against a window pane or other unstable surface.
- If you're using a straight or extension ladder, the angle of the ladder is also a critical safety factor. A straight or extension ladder should be placed 1 foot away from the surface it rests against for every 4 feet of ladder height. For example, if the ladder is 4 feet high, the bottom of the ladder should be 1 foot away from the support surface. If you use a ladder to access a roof or platform, make sure the ladder extends at least 3 feet over the roof or platform edge. Securely fasten straight and extension ladders to the upper support. If you have angled the ladder properly and still have doubts about its stability, have someone hold the ladder before climbing up.
- If you're using a step ladder, open it completely and ensure the spreaders are locked in place before you climb. If you have to use a step ladder near a doorway, lock or barricade the door and post signs so no one will open it and knock you off the ladder.

Climb with care
- When you climb, face the ladder and grip the rungs of the ladder, not the side rails. Never get on or off a ladder from the side unless it has been secured to prevent movement.
- Never climb with equipment in your hands. Use your pockets, equipment belt, or a tool pouch and raise heavy objects with a hand line. If you forget something, climb down the ladder to retrieve it yourself; don't have someone toss it up to you. And never ask someone to climb up your ladder to give you supplies. It's dangerous to exceed the weight limits that a specific ladder can handle.
- When you descend a ladder, practice the same safety rules. Face the ladder, keep your body square, and hold on to the rungs. Lastly, step off at the bottom rung of the ladder; never jump off a ladder.

Think before you carry
- Before you start to haul a ladder around, evaluate the area where you'll be working. Ladders can be heavy and unwieldy. You can strike another person or object, or hit electrical power lines.
- Make the ladder as compact as possible before transporting it. Carry it horizontally while tilting it higher in front and lower in back. If the ladder is particularly long and heavy, get a coworker to help you carry it.

Ladder safety may seem simple, but injuries occur every day. Below are some ladder safety dos and don'ts:
- Do use the right ladder for the job.
- Do inspect your ladder before and after a job.
- Do read all warning labels carefully and follow directions before you climb.
- Do clean the ladder after each use to prevent dirt buildup.
- Do wear clean, dry, slip-resistant shoes and use ladders with slip-resistant feet.
- Don't stand any higher than the third rung from the top of the ladder.
- Don't lean too far or overreach, reposition the ladder closer to the work instead.
- Don't use a ladder as a bridge or scaffold.
- Don't put a ladder on a box, barrel or other object to gain additional height.
- Don't use a damaged or unsafe ladder.

Experts also warn about ladder use in bad weather. Descend immediately if high winds, rain, or other inclement weather begins. Wind force can blow you off the ladder. Rain can make the rungs and the ground slippery. Bitter cold can make metal ladders more brittle and can cause other structural damage. If you encounter bad weather while on a ladder, do not speed up to finish the job and risk injury. Wait to finish the job until conditions are once again safe.

Remember, don't let gravity bring you down. Practice ladder safety every time you climb to make your work easier, faster, and safer.

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