

Safe use of Ladders and Stepladders

Nationally, a third of all reported fall from height incidents, involve ladders and stepladders. On average this accounts for 14 deaths and 1200 major injuries to workers each year (1). Many of these injuries are caused by inappropriate or incorrect use of the equipment. Ladders have not been banned from the workplace.

The key message is that ladders should only be used for light, low risk work of short duration at lower levels.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommend Class 1 “Industrial” or BS EN 131 compliant ladders or stepladders for use at work. Class 3, for “Domestic” use should not be used in the workplace. Council owned ladders and step ladders must not be lent to contractors or other groups of non employees.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 requires a risk assessment to be carried out to identify and assess any work at height that is undertaken as part of work activities. This will ensure that ladders are used appropriately, and to identify any precautions that are needed.

Choice of equipment will be determined by assessing:

- the task to be undertaken (e.g. height and equipment needed to do the job);
- the site conditions and location;
- the extent and duration of the work;
- the frequency of access required;
- risks associated with the task; and,
- the number of people required to do the job.



Before use, you must establish if the stepladder is in a safe condition. A stepladder should have no visible defects and a pre use check should be carried out before using it. Stepladders should be maintained and stored in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions.

Formal checks are made on the condition of stepladders every 6 months and it is advisable to check the records prior to use. Ladders should be labelled to show that they have been checked, by whom and the date of the next check with faulty ladders being labelled as faulty and withdrawn from use.

Ladder and stepladder safety

The following bullet points give some important information on the use of both “leaning ladders” and “step ladders”

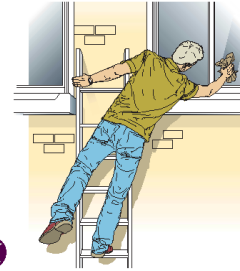
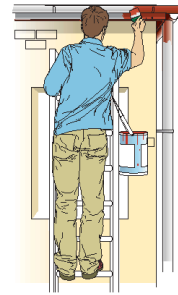
Set up for leaning ladders

- Do a daily pre-use check (include ladder feet).
- Secure it by tying to a suitable point to prevent movement.
- Ground should be firm, hard and level.
- Maximum safe ground side slope 16 degrees (level the rungs with a suitable device).
- Maximum safe ground back slope 6 degrees (level with a suitable device).
- Have a strong upper resting point (not plastic guttering).
- Floors must be clean, not slippery

- Ensure ladders are fitted with anti-slip feet.

Leaning ladders in-use

- Short duration work (maximum 30 minutes)
- Light work (up to 10kg)
- Ladder angle 75 degrees – 1 in 4 rule (1 unit out for 4 units up)
- Always grip the ladder when climbing
- Do not overreach – make sure your belt buckle (navel) stays within the stiles and keep both feet on the same rung or step throughout the task
- Do not work off the top three rungs – this provides a handhold
- Maintain three points of contact (minimum of both feet and one hand).
- Do not leave ladders unattended.
- Warning signs should be displayed in public areas and protection from traffic is essential.
- Personal tools and equipment should be secured at all times when working on, or going up or down a ladder, (e.g. use tool belts or carriers).



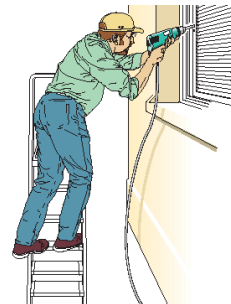
Set up for stepladders

- Daily pre-use check (feet included)
- Ensure there is space to fully open the ladders.
- Use any locking devices
- Ground should be firm, hard and level.
- Floors should be clean, not slippery
- Ensure ladders are fitted with anti-slip feet.



Stepladders in use

- Short duration work (maximum 30 minutes)
- Light work (up to 10 kg)
- Do not work off the top two steps for swing-back/double sided stepladders) unless you have a safe handhold on the steps
- Avoid side-on working. Use with the steps facing the work activity.
- Do not overreach – make sure your belt buckle (navel) stays within the stiles and keep both feet on the same rung or step throughout the task.



Other Resources

Health and Safety Training – Working at Height (Online Awareness Training)
 Health and Safety Training – Safe Use of Ladders and Step Ladders (Practical Course)
 Health and Safety Training – Tool box talk: Using Equipment to Access Heights
 AS39 – Working at Heights
 GD23 – Working at Height - Prevention of Injury
 HSF52 – Pre Use Inspection Form
 HSF53 – 6 Month Inspection Form