

## **April 2003 - Ladder Safety**

Ladders are pretty uncomplicated devices. But, unfortunately, they cause more than their share of accidents. Falls account for almost 13 percent of workplace deaths and over 16 percent of workplace injuries, and ladders are involved in many of those accidents. These accidents happen when people select the wrong ladder for the job, don't inspect it properly before using it, or get careless about how it is used.

The first step in protection is to select the right ladder for the job. Ladders are rated for how much weight they can safely hold. It is strongly recommended that only Type I industrial ladders be used. The weight limits include both you and any equipment you're carrying. Check the rating before you select a ladder and choose a ladder that's the correct length for the job.

Before climbing any ladder, check its condition. Look for such things as tightness of nuts and bolts, look for cracks or splits on wooden ladders, make sure rungs and steps are in place and firmly attached, ensure spreaders are working properly, that safety feet are working properly and metal ladders are not dented or bent. If a ladder has anything missing or broken, don't use it. Tag it as, "Dangerous, Do Not Use" and remove it from service.

Before you climb, check these basic rules for ladder safety...

### **Stepladders**

- Make sure the spreaders are locked open before climbing.
- Make sure nearby doors are locked or walkways barricaded to prevent collisions.
- Never overreach while working on a stepladder. Move the ladder instead.
- Never climb or stand on the top two steps.
- Never use as a straight ladder.

### **Straight Ladders**

- Always use the 4-to-1 rule: Position the base of the ladder one foot out from the wall for every four feet of the ladder's height up to the support point.
- A straight ladder should extend at least three feet past its support point.
- Have the ladder bottom tied or held.
- Tie down the ladder as close to the support point as possible.
- Use only ladders that have properly functioning safety feet.
- Never stand on the top four rungs of a straight ladder.
- Never overreach: the trunk of your body should not extend past the side of the ladder.
- Never use the ladder in a horizontal position as a platform, runway or scaffold.

On two-section extension ladders the minimum overlap for the two sections in use must be as follows:

Up to and including 36 feet ----- 3 feet overlap  
Over 36 up to and including 48 feet ----- 4 feet overlap  
Over 48 up to and including 60 feet ----- 5 feet overlap

### **All Ladders**

- Set up ladders on a firm level surface.
- Use wide boards under the feet if you're on soft ground.
- Never place a ladder on boxes, barrels, or other unstable bases to obtain more height.
- Place signs and barricades around the work area.
- Never have more than one person on the ladder.
- Always wear slip-resistant footwear.
- Keep the ladder rungs free of oil and grease.
- Use both hands to climb.
- Always go up and down facing the ladder, holding on with both hands.
- While working, hold on to the ladder with one hand at all times.
- Use a tool belt or a bucket attached to a hand line to pull tools up.
- Never try to move a ladder while you're on it.
- Never use a metal ladder when working with electrical current.

Ladders safety is just as important at home as at work. There is no reason for them to cause accidents if you select the correct ladder, check them carefully before use, set them up safely, and exercise good ladder safety practices when working on them. You might want to conduct a good safety check on your ladders at home. You might be surprised what you've got. It may be time for a replacement.