



Ladder Safety

Ladders are a simple device used for safe climbing, and that may be their biggest fault. Workers using them tend to mistake simplicity for harmlessness, forgetting precautions or rules of proper use. That kind of mistake causes thousands of accidents and disabling injuries every year.

Most accidents with straight ladders are caused by the ladder skidding or slipping. This is easy to prevent: equip the ladder with a nonslip base like safety feet, or block the base of the ladder.

Lashing the ladder is another precaution against moving or slipping. Make sure the lashing is there when it is needed; permanently attach a short length of rope to a side rail. Also, make sure the ladder is placed at a safe angle so that the distance from the wall to the base of the ladder is about one-fourth the distance from the base to the ladder's top support.

When you are setting up a ladder, make sure the footing is level and that the ladder rests on a firm platform. Lean the ladder against something solid and unmovable, not against a window sash or glass surface. Also, make sure the ladder top juts well above a roof edge, beam, plank, or scaffold so that the climber has plenty of side rail to hold onto when stepping off. Three feet is the recommend safe amount.

Once the ladder is properly in place, step onto it facing the rungs and grasping the rails with both hands. Do not hurry up the rungs, but climb one at a time.

Never try to carry tools or anything else up a ladder, because hands should be free for climbing. Instead, hang tools in a sack or from a strap placed over the shoulder, or use a bucket or line to haul them up later.

While working on a ladder, do not try to reach out too far, but move the ladder as work requires. Never go higher than the third rung from the top on a straight ladder.

