

Safety and Ladders - Part I

There is absolutely no reason for anybody to get hurt, disabled or killed while using a ladder. Yet it happens every single day. Somebody steps on the safety sticker that says "This is not a step!" and ends up with a broken leg. Another worker puts a rock under one of the legs because the ladder is "just not quite stable enough". On the way to the hospital, it occurs to her, through the pain of her broken arm, that maybe that was not such a good idea after all. On another job, a fellow reaches out just a little bit to far and...well...he's no longer with us. Virtually every single ladder accident could and should have been prevented. It only takes a few rules to prevent a accident from occurring while using ladders. Stick to the following simple rules to ensure that you or your fellow workers are never injured while using a ladder:

- **CHOOSE THE RIGHT LADDER:** Always select a ladder which is the correct length to safely reach the working height. Also ensure that the ladder is of the correct duty, or weight rating. The combined weight of the user, their tools and materials should NEVER exceed the rating of the ladder. Most ladders are available with weight ratings of 200, 225, 250 and 300 lbs. Select the right one or GET the right one.
- **CHECK THE CONDITION OF THE LADDER:** Read all the labels on the ladder then check for split or cracked side rails, missing or broken rungs, loose rungs or other weaknesses. Also check for splinters and sharp edges.
- **PLACE THE LADDER WITH YOUR SAFETY IN MIND:** Plan before you setup the ladder. Make sure the ladder has firm footing and that it's feet are one-quarter the length of the ladder away from the upright surface to be climbed. Don't use a step ladder as a single ladder. If you are using a step ladder, make sure it is fully open with the spreaders properly locked.
- **CLIMB THE LADDER CAREFULLY.** Keep your mind on where you are and what you're doing. Wear the proper shoes with good soles and that are free of grease or mud. Always face the ladder and use both hands when climbing up or down. Don't carry your tools or materials: raise and lower them with a hand line: *don't have someone toss them up to you or just drop them when you are finished.* If you don't feel well, DON'T climb the ladder. Always climb and work from the center of the ladder. Don't climb up the "back" side of a step ladder and never stand on the top of it.
- **NEVER OVERREACH! MOVE THE LADDER INSTEAD:** Breaking this one simple rule causes more accidents than you can possibly imagine.
- **TIE OFF THE LADDER:** Once you have climbed to your working height, tie-off the ladder and use a safety belt.
- **TAKE CARE OF YOUR LADDERS:** When you are finished with your ladder, put it back where it belongs. Always keep them clean and free of excess material. Store them in a safe and dry place, out of direct exposure to the sun and the elements. Make sure your ladders are tied down during transit. Never paint a wooden ladder. You can however use clear wood preservatives.

Your ladder is one of your most important tools. It is also is one or your most unforgiving if misused or mistreated; so use it safely and wisely.