

# Loss Control Insights

## Ladder Safety

Portable ladders are a simple and effective means for climbing safely to a work area. However, careless use of ladders has led to thousands of disabling injuries and even fatalities. These accidents could have been avoided by following three basic safety rules.

1. Use a ladder that is the right type and size for the job to be done. The right type of ladder means using a heavy ladder for construction work—not a light household-type ladder. Metal ladders should never be used if you are working near exposed electrical circuits or power lines. This is particularly important if you are working in fields near power lines where a wind may blow the ladder into those lines. If you are working around trees and shrubs, check to be sure that power lines are not hidden behind them. The safest stepladder is 10 feet long or less. Never splice ladders together or place a ladder on an unstable base such as a barrel or box to gain additional height.
2. Don't use a ladder that is in poor condition. Inspect the ladder each time you use it. Check for missing, broken, or weakened rungs, side rails, and cleats. Make sure that auxiliary equipment such as ropes, pulleys, and extension ladder locks are in good repair. Clean oil or grease off ladder rungs and side rails to prevent slipping. Do not use a defective ladder. If your ladder needs repair, mark or tag it: DANGEROUS—DO NOT USE! If it cannot be repaired, dispose of it permanently.
3. Take commonsense precautions when positioning a ladder or working on it. Position your ladder from the wall at a distance equal to approximately one-fourth the length of the ladder (at a 75.5 degree angle). Make sure the footing is secure. If it isn't, lash it to the point where the ladder touches the surface it is leaning against. NEVER lean a ladder against something that might move.

When placing a ladder up against a building, don't lean it on a window sash. Instead, fasten a board securely across the ladder so that the board extends across the window and for some distance on either side of the window.

As you climb up and down the ladder, always face the ladder and use both hands to hold the side rails. Don't carry tools or materials in your hands as you climb. Instead, put them in your work apron or use a rope and bucket to raise and lower them to and from the work area.

Always stay below the top three ladder rungs, unless you have a firm handhold or are wearing a secured safety belt. Keep the ladder from becoming unsteady by not leaning or overreaching from it. Never reposition a ladder while you are standing on it.

If you are working in front of a door that opens toward a ladder you are working on, block the door, lock it, or guard it. Have a co-worker guard your work area to prevent anyone or anything from accidentally bumping into the ladder. Barricade or rope off the space around it.