



Ladders for General Industry: Overview

5-Minute Talk

Overview

Ladders are indispensable for so many jobs like reaching storage areas, making equipment repairs, or doing building maintenance. Unfortunately, people think more about the task at hand than the ladder that will get them there.

Hazards involved with using ladders

The main hazard involved with ladder use is falls. OSHA found that fatal falls from ladders averaged 56 per year. When reviewing serious injuries, OSHA determined that 22.3 percent of falls to a lower level are the result of falls from ladders.

A fall can be the result when a ladder fails due to overloading or damage. Employees can fall if they slip or lose their balance while climbing on the ladder. Employees also risk a fall if they reach too far while working on top of a ladder. Weather can be a factor when ladders are used outside. Oil or grease on a ladder can also contribute to a fall. Ladders that are not set up securely can shift, causing the person on the ladder to fall. Ladders that are not protected from traffic can be accidentally hit at the base to cause a fall.

OSHA regulations for general industry

OSHA's general industry standard on ladders (29 CFR 1910.23) applies to the design, use, and care of portable ladders, fixed ladders, and mobile ladder stands and platforms.

Under 1910.30, employees need training on the proper care, inspection, storage, and use of ladders.

A few precautions for safe ladder use:

- Select a ladder with adequate length and load limits.
- Inspect the ladder for defects at the start of each shift that it will be used.
- Do not use metal ladders near electrical lines.
- Set up the ladder on a firm, solid surface. Don't place a ladder on boxes, blocks, or a scaffold to make it taller.
- Face the ladder as you climb up and down.
- Firmly grasp the ladder with at least one hand at all times while climbing up and down.



- Carry tools or other materials in a tool belt or backpack. Or, hoist items up to you after you've reached the top of the ladder.
- Work within the side rails. If your belt buckle goes past the side rail, you are leaning too far. Descend and move the ladder as needed to stay close to your work.
- Use racks or hooks to store portable ladders securely.

Some examples of ladder inspection points

With all the effort that goes into designing a ladder to make it safe, be sure to follow-up and inspect the ladder before each shift it will be used and after any incident that could have caused damage.

Follow the manufacturer's inspection guidelines. In general, inspect ladders for:

- Splinters or sharp edges,
- Rust,
- Broken or missing rungs or steps,
- Broken or split side rails,
- A tight fit between steps and side rails,
- Rungs that are free of grease or oil,
- Secure hardware and fittings,
- Moveable parts that operate freely without binding or excessive play,
- Proper lubrication on wheels or pulleys, and
- Any frayed or badly worn rope on extension ladders.

Employee training

Employees need training on the proper care, inspection, storage, and use of ladders.

Training tips

Meet with the trainees in an area where you have room to set up several portable ladders. Refer to the ladders as you explain ladder selection, inspection, safe climbing techniques, and storage. Have the employees practice ladder set-up, inspection, and safe climbing techniques.

