

Ladders for General Industry: Selection, Set-up, and Use

5-Minute Talk

Overview

You must select a portable ladder that is strong enough to handle the weight of you and any materials you carry. If the ladder has a safety label, check it for the ladder's duty rating and other important information.

When you select a ladder, consider what are you using the ladder for and the conditions in the environment where the ladder will be used. For example, you'll need to be aware of any uneven surfaces or obstructions, and if you're working near sources of electricity, don't use a metal ladder (choose fiberglass or wood instead).

Consider the height of the ladder. It should be long enough so you can easily use it. Never, under any circumstances, fasten two or more ladders together. Along those same lines, never place ladders on boxes, barrels, or other unstable bases to obtain additional height.

Ladder stability

Regardless of the type of ladder you choose, you'll want to position it on a firm, level surface. Secure and stabilize the ladder to prevent it from moving while in use. If you're in a high-traffic area, or if the ladder itself could create a hazard for others, put up a temporary barricade, like cones or caution tape, to keep others away from the ladder while in use.

To set up stepstools, stepladders, or combination ladders, make sure spreaders and locking devices are properly engaged. Never step on the top two steps of a stepladder.



The 4-to-1 rule

For single ladders and extension ladders, you'll need to follow the 4-to-1 rule. This means for every four feet of the ladder's length from the ground to its top support, you'll need to position the ladder out a foot from the wall. For example, for a working length of 16 feet, you will need four feet between the wall and the base of the ladder.

The side rails of a single ladder or extension ladder used to access an upper landing surface must extend at least three feet above the roof line to keep the ladder stable.

Never extend an extension ladder while a worker is on it.

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.

Where to go for more information.

29 CFR 1910, Subpart D—Walking-working surfaces. §§1910.23 and 1910.30.

