

Ladders for General Industry: Overview

Handout

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.

Ladder hazards

The main hazard involved with ladder use is falls. Falls can be caused by:

- Using a damaged ladder,
- Overloading the ladder,
- Not setting up the ladder securely,
- Slipping or losing your balance,
- Reaching too far out from the ladder,
- Using a ladder in rainy or windy conditions,
- Oil or grease on the ladder, or
- Not protecting a ladder set up in a high-traffic area

Safe use

When you use a ladder:

- 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.



Ladder inspections

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.

