

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Fall Prevention – Avoiding Falls While Using Portable Ladders

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart X]

Here are some tips to help you avoid falling while using portable ladders at work, as well as at home:

- **Use the right length of portable ladder for the job.** If your ladder is too short to allow you to safely reach the work point, DO NOT set it on makeshift devices such as a box, barrel, or pallet to gain extra height. And **NEVER** lash two separate ladders together to make one longer ladder! Instead, take the time to go get the proper length ladder required for the job.
- **Always stand on the lowest ladder rung possible to safely perform your work.** Do not stand on or above any ladder rung designated by the ladder manufacturer as unsafe for use. Also, do not work with one foot supported on a ladder rung while your other foot is supported on another surface; this may cause the ladder to slide to one side and make you fall.
- **Always maintain as many points of contact as possible when working from a portable ladder.** Do not carry anything in either hand while climbing up or down a ladder. When stationary, face the ladder, keep both feet firmly planted on the same ladder rung or step, and maintain a firm grip with at least one hand when possible. Should it become necessary to use both hands to perform work for a short period of time, keep both feet firmly planted on the same ladder rung, and support the upper portion of your body by leaning your chest, thighs, or knees forward against the ladder.
- **Keep your body centered as closely as possible on the ladder at all times.** Avoid reaching too far to one side or the other, as this can cause you to lose balance, or can even cause the ladder to fall over to one side. A good rule of thumb to minimize over-reaching is to keep your belt buckle located between the side-rails of the ladder at all times. Even better, try to keep your sternum (the point at the center of your chest) located between the side rails of the ladder you are using.
- **Do not climb a step ladder that is leaning against a wall or other structure.** A step ladder's feet are not designed to safely set on the ground or other surface in a leaning position, and could cause the bottom of the ladder to slip out. *(You may wish to point out that this rule does not apply to specialty ladders which are designed by some manufacturers to lean against a wall, if applicable).*
- **Do not climb up the back side of a step ladder.** The cross braces on back of your portable step ladder are just that; braces. They are not designed to support your weight, the spacing between the braces is too far apart to climb safely, and they are not treated to prevent your foot from slipping off. *(You may wish to point out that this rule does not apply to specialty ladders designed by some manufacturers to be climbed on both sides, if applicable).*
- **Never set up your ladder in the back of a truck bed, on top of a trailer, or in the bucket of a front-end loader or other vehicle.** Even though we would like to believe there is no way the vehicle could move and cause your ladder to fall, unintended things do happen on occasion.
- **Do not salvage and use undamaged sections of a broken ladder.** If one part of the ladder is damaged or broken, take the entire ladder out of service. Do not separate the "good" section to use for climbing or other purpose. It should also go without saying that making any kind of structural repairs or modifications to broken ladders in the field must not be done either.

Does anyone have a question or another safety tip to add to today's toolbox talk on avoiding falls when using portable ladders? Thank you for your participation. Please be sure to sign your name on the training certification form so you will get credit for attending today's OSHA toolbox training session.

