

RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Portable Ladder Safety

Many work site injuries are caused by accidents involving ladders that are not inspected, placed properly, or used safely. Following these safety guidelines can help prevent ladder accidents.

General Rules:

- Choose the appropriate type and size ladder for the job, including correct fittings, and safety feet.
- Train employees on proper ladder use.
- Make proper ladder use a performance requirement for the job.
- Require employees to complete a ladder inspection before each use.

Selecting the Right Ladder:

Ladders are constructed from one of three materials: wood, fiberglass, and metal (aluminum). If working near sources of electricity, do not use a metal (aluminum) one as they are an electrical conductor. The potential for an electrical shock while working can trigger a fall or cause your heart to stop, leading to serious injury or death.

Consider the following when making your selection:

- **What will be the total load for the task?**
The duty rating label on the ladder will indicate the maximum weight capacity the ladder can safely carry. Consider your weight plus weight of your clothing, PPE, tools and supplies you are carrying.
- **What height of ladder is required for the task?**
The top cap or step below the cap should not be used due to likelihood of losing your balance. An extension ladder, the top three rungs should not be used for climbing. Ladder should not extend more than three feet beyond the upper support point.
- **What material is best for the conditions?**
Aluminum is lightweight and sturdy but should not be used near sources of electricity.



Inspecting Ladders:

Ladders should be inspected before initial use in each work shift and more frequently as necessary. Below is a checklist on what to look for.

What to Inspect for:	
☐	Cracks, splits, or missing rungs
☐	Broken, split or missing side rails
☐	Loose, corroded or weakened fasteners, including spreaders and rivets
☐	Missing or damaged feet
☐	Free from oil, dirt, or debris
☐	Duty Rating label is intact
☐	Paint – (paint hides cracks, defects, and other structural damage)

Any ladder with structural or other defects should be tagged “Dangerous: Do Not Use” and removed from service until repaired.

Using Ladders

Do not use a ladder if you feel tired, dizzy, or prone to losing your balance. Ladders are safe tools when used properly. Follow these rules:

General Safety:

- Wear the proper footwear (slip-resistant with heavy soles)
- To avoid slipping on a ladder, check your shoes for oil, grease, or mud and wipe it off before climbing.
- Always use three points of contact when climbing or descending.
- Use stepladder only when base is spread fully open, and spreaders locked.
- The cap and top step of a stepladder are not used as steps.
- Never try to increase the height of a ladder by standing it on other objects, such boxes, or barrels, or by splicing two ladders together.
- Keep ladders away from doorways or walkways unless they can be protected by barriers.
- Keep the area around the top and base of the ladder clear. Don’t run hoses, extension cords, or ropes on a ladder; these may create obstructions.
- Use a tool belt or hand line to carry materials.
- Most ladders are designed to hold only one person at a time. Two persons may cause the ladder to fail or be thrown off balance.
- Don’t lean out to the side when you’re on a ladder. If something is out of reach, get down and move the ladder.
- Ladders should never be used sideways as platforms, runways, or scaffolds.
- Do not place in front of closed doors that can open toward the ladder. Door must be blocked open, locked or guarded.



Straight or Extension Ladders:

- Be sure straight or extension ladders are long enough so that the side rails extend above the top support point by at least 36 inches.
- Set the ladder on solid footing, against a solid support.
- Place the base of a ladder out away from the wall or edge of the upper level about one foot for every four feet of vertical height.

- Portable ladders should be tied, blocked, or otherwise secured against movement.

This Alliant Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.