LADDER SAFETY
For Residential Construction Contractors

Keep Your Workers Safe — Improper Ladder Use Can Be Fatal!

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A 62-year-old general contractor fell 20 feet while installing exterior molding from the second floor porch of a new home. The contractor was working from a 7-foot step ladder and lost his balance. His workers found him on the ground with the ladder on top of him. He died that night.

A 29-year-old carpenter was electrocuted when the aluminum ladder he was carrying made contact with an overhead power line. The carpenter was moving the 40-foot ladder from the front of a 3-family residence when it made contact with the power line 24 feet above the ground.

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Plan Ahead for the Job and Inspect Ladders Before Use

First, can the task be done safely from a ladder? If not, use scaffolding or a lift. If using ladders:

- Bring the right ladder for the job: self-supporting, straight, or extension ladder.
- Check the duty rating label on the ladder. Don’t overload.
- Heavy-duty industrial ladders (Type 1 or 1A), can only carry up to 250 or 300 pounds including the worker and their tools.
- Check the ladder for loose, cracked or greasy rungs, split side rails, and worn shoes. Make sure the rung locks are in working order.
- Tag and remove defective ladders from the job site.
- Don’t use a ladder in a horizontal position as a scaffold.
- Call the electric company for assistance if working near power lines, to prevent electrocution.

Setting Up Ladders

- Clear away debris and obstructions, and block off the area around the bottom of the ladder to prevent it from being bumped into.
- Set the ladder on dry, level ground. Use the “heel test” to check firmness of the ground. Stomp your heel down; if it goes into the ground more than 1 inch, a base is needed below the ladder.
- If a base is needed, set it on a secure, even surface. Plywood can be used if it is dry, clean and sturdy enough to support the expected load.
- Set the base of the ladder at a distance of 1 foot out for every 4 feet high.
- When accessing a porch or roof, extend ladder side rails 3 feet above landing. For extra stability, secure the ladder by tying it to the building.
- If a ladder must be placed in front of a door, secure the door shut so it cannot open.
- Use ladder stabilizers when appropriate.

Climbing Ladders

- Allow only one person on the ladder at a time. Always face the ladder.
- Maintain 3-point contact with the ladder at all times: two hands and one foot, or one hand and two feet.
- Use a tool belt or hoist to lift tools. Never carry tools or materials in-hand while climbing the ladder.
- Do not work from the top three rungs of an extension ladder.
- Do not work from the top or top step of a step ladder. Never work from a closed step ladder.
- When working on ladders on elevated porches and balconies, remember a fall can be hazardous.

Working from Ladders

- Keep your belt buckle centered between ladder side rails at all times (“belt buckle rule”).
- To help keep your balance, don’t pull, lean, stretch, or make sudden moves while on the ladder.
- Work can be performed more quickly and easily if you don’t overreach. Always climb off and reposition the ladder.

Maintain Ladders

- Change the shoes of the ladder regularly.
- Lubricate metal bearings, locks and pulleys.

Train Your Workers

Though used every day, ladders are often taken for granted. They are a major cause of injury. Ladders are complicated tools, and training is required.

- Make sure you and your workers understand and follow safe work procedures.

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Fact: A fall from a ladder can leave you severely injured for life. With this kind of injury, you might not be able to take care of yourself or your family.

Fact: It only takes 1 second to hit the ground from a 16-foot fall. Over half of the fatal falls in construction are from heights of less than 25 feet.

— This brochure only highlights key points. Consult the OSHA standard 29 CFR 1926.1053 for a complete list of ladder safety requirements. —