



# PORTABLE STEPLADDERS

## WORK PRACTICES FOR SAFE USE



This talk discusses how to make sure a stepladder is the right type and in good condition for the job, along with work practices for using it safely.

### Materials to have on hand:

- Type(s) of stepladder(s) (e.g., wood, metal, fiberglass) used in the workplace.
- Samples of broken or defective stepladders, if available.

### Items for attendees to consider during talk:

- How often should you inspect the condition of a stepladder?
- What's a good way to estimate if a stepladder is not tall enough to safely use it for the job?

## TALK

Stepladders are self-supporting A-frame ladders that are a simple and effective way to climb safely to a work area. You'll prevent injuries by following a few basic safe practices. Many of the safe practices for climbing and working from other types of portable ladders also work for stepladders, but for now we'll just review ones that are unique to stepladders.

**[See Talks that apply to portable straight and extension ladders.]**

**Make sure a stepladder is the right type for the job.** The "right" type means using one that is the right

height, one that has the capacity to support the weight on it, and one that is on a level surface for all four legs.

Painter's stepladders have a maximum height of 12 feet. The maximum height for any stepladder is 20 feet, so consider that when choosing the right type of ladder for the job. A good rule of thumb is if the worker would have to stand on the top step or cap of a stepladder to reach the work area, choose a taller straight or extension ladder or a scaffold instead.

Use a heavy-duty stepladder for construction work where it may have to carry a variety of loads—not a light household-type ladder or painter's ladder. Read a duty rating chart or the rating on the ladder's label for the load the stepladder can safely handle. The load should include your weight plus the weight of any equipment or supplies you may handle.

Never use a metal stepladder if you work near exposed electrical wiring, equipment, or power lines—use a wooden or fiberglass stepladder that won't conduct electricity. There is a real danger of electrocution or equipment damage, even if you work away from power lines, because wind could blow the ladder into those lines when unattended.

**Set up and use the ladder safely.** Make sure the ground surface is level for all four legs of a stepladder—if the ground is uneven, the steps of the ladder will be uneven for climbing and working, creating a high risk for a fall.

Always maintain three points of contact with the ladder—two hands and a foot or both feet and a

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**Talk Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor/Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Attendees:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

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hand. Alternate one hand with one foot as you climb up or down. Keep contact with both feet and one hand while working.

Don't climb higher than the second step from the top of a stepladder—at that height, it's likely you'll lose your balance or the ladder will tip over. NEVER stand on the top or cap of the stepladder.

Make sure the spreader bars open and close freely and are fully extended and locked in place before you climb.

Never use the cross bracing on the rear or back side rails for climbing up or down.

Check the spreader bar hinges to make sure they are secure and in good condition—no rust or corrosion and not loose or damaged.

If there is a pail shelf attachment, make sure it is securely attached and in good working condition.

Never leave tools or equipment on the pail shelf when you're not using the ladder. People can get hurt by falling objects left on the shelf when moving the ladder.

Never use a stepladder with the spreader bars closed as if it is a straight ladder, because the steps won't be level and the feet of the side rails can easily slide out during use.

## **Don't use a stepladder that's in poor condition.**

Inspect the stepladder before each use and after someone else has used it. Check for missing, broken, or weakened rungs and side rails. Clean oil or grease off ladder rungs and side rails to prevent slipping. Don't use a defective ladder.

Mark or tag a defective ladder **DANGEROUS—DO NOT USE!** if it needs repair. If it can't be fixed, dispose of it.

