

Ladder safety

Inspect a ladder like a pro!

Ladder inspections should be performed by a “competent person,”—someone able to identify workplace hazards and who has the authority and the resources to fix them. Here’s what to look for:

- Ensure bottom feet are unbroken and slip-resistant pads are in place.
- Inspect all rungs, rails, shelves, spreaders, and rung locks. Nothing should be cracked, bent, missing, loose, or rusted.
- Secure all bolts and rivets.
- Check for foreign material on ladder, like oil or grease.
- All labels should be in place and readable.
- Tag ladders “out of service” until repaired or discarded.

It’s easy to fall off a ladder, because they’re everywhere—at both work and home—and we use them for everything from cleaning gutters to getting items off of high shelves. So, it’s not surprising that about 20% of workplace falls involve ladders, and around 81% of all fall injuries requiring an emergency room visit are related to ladders.

Despite this, some workplaces expect employees to use a ladder without any training or information. This brief overview of ladder safety makes a great starting point for general ladder training. Remember to review issues specific to your location—and provide hands-on ladder training. There’s no substitute for actual experience.

Selecting a ladder

Ladders should be selected based on how they will be used. Light duty ladders may work for changing a light bulb at home, but have no place on a construction site. Here’s other considerations:

Pick the right material

- Wood | electrically nonconductive, but can be heavy and can rot if wood is untreated
- Aluminum | unsafe around electricity; lightweight and corrosion-resistant
- Fiberglass | strong, lightweight, and electrically nonconductive, but can be expensive

Load limits

- Designed for the weight it will hold, including worker and equipment
- All ladders must have a duty rating sticker:

IAA: Special duty - 375 lbs.

IA: Extra heavy duty - 300 lbs.

I: Heavy duty - 250 lbs.

II: Medium duty - 225 lbs.

III: Light duty - 200 lbs.



Using a ladder

DON'T:

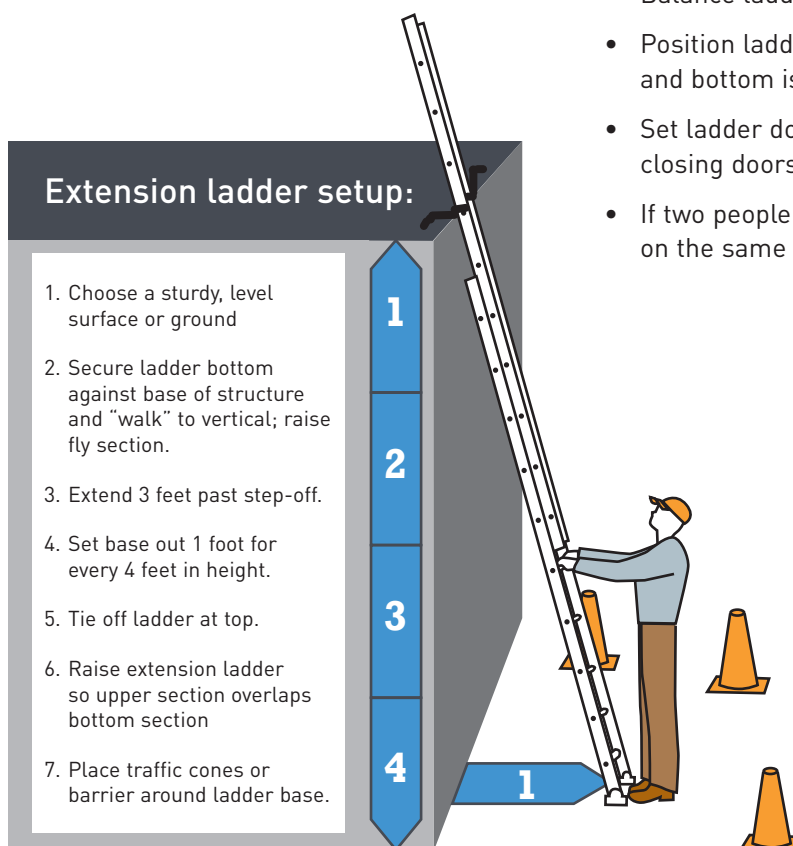
- "Walk" a ladder by rocking it
- Use a step ladder as a straight ladder
- Carry tools in your hands
- Climb using bracing on back of ladder
- Use a broken ladder
- Stand on top cap or step, or on top three rungs of an extension ladder
- Move someone else's ladder without their knowledge
- Have more than one person on a ladder
- Use a ladder if you are light-headed, dizzy, on medication, fatigued, or otherwise impaired

Setting up a ladder

- Find a stable surface, and level out uneven ground.
- Secure ladders to prevent movement.
- Allow no debris or clutter around ladder.
- Open ladders all the way, and always put locking mechanism in place.
- Lock or guard door if ladder blocks a doorway.
- Never place ladders on boxes, barrels, or other materials to make it taller.
- Never use other items (like boxes, milk crates, or chairs) as ladders.
- Keep ladder free from mud, grease, or other substances.
- Consider traffic around ladder and act to protect the set-up.
- Check for hazards during set-up, such as power lines, nails, beams, or sharp edges.

Using a ladder

- Face the ladder when ascending, descending, or performing work.



- Maintain 3 points of contact (both feet and one hand or both hands and one foot).
- Climb the ladder holding the rungs, not the side rails.
- Climb completely past the landing before stepping over.
- Stay centered using the "belt buckle rule" – keep your belt buckle between the side rails

Storing a ladder

- Store your ladder in a well-ventilated area.
- Secure ladders to prevent tipovers or tripping using cords, straps, wall brackets, or racks.
- Don't store materials on ladders.

Maintaining a ladder

- Performed by a "competent person" (see sidebar on page 1 for definition)
- Clean and lightly lubricate moving parts.
- Replace damaged parts, including labels.

Transporting a ladder

- Lift ladder using your leg muscles.
- Carry ladder close to your body.
- Balance ladder on your shoulder.
- Position ladder so top is above your head and bottom is near the ground.
- Set ladder down when opening and closing doors.
- If two people carry a ladder, they should be on the same side.