

Safety Zone: Ladder Safety

Falls from portable ladders are a major source of injury in the workplace. Anyone who uses a ladder should have hands-on safety training to learn about the various risks involved and the precautions necessary to prevent falling.

To View a Series of Helpful Ladder Safety Videos

- Visit <https://amtrustfinancial.com/loss-control/streaming-videos>
- Click the “View Videos” list and log in
- Search for Ladder Safety videos

Choosing the Right Ladder

Using a ladder for purposes not anticipated in its design is a common cause of falls. In settings where multiple ladders are available to workers, they may not properly assess their differences and may not select the appropriate ladder for the job at hand. Employers should proactively ensure that the right ladder is provided for a specific job or task. *Warning: never use a chair, barrel, box, table or anything else not designed for climbing and supporting a load as a makeshift ladder.*



Inspecting a Ladder

Before using any ladder, inspect it and look for the following faults:

- Loose or missing rungs, cleats, or bracing
- Loose nails, bolts, or screws
- Cracked, broken, split, dented, or badly worn rungs, cleats, or side rails
- Wood splinters
- Corrosion of metal ladders or metal parts, and missing or damaged foot pads

If you find a ladder with defects or in generally poor condition, don't use it. Report it and tag it so others won't try to use it. Except for re-tightening loose fasteners, only a manufacturer can adequately and safely repair a ladder, so defective ladders must be removed from the workplace as soon as possible.

Setting Up a Ladder

Once you've inspected your ladder and established that it's in good condition, it's important to know where and how to set up the ladder.

- Before setting up any ladder, check for overhead electrical wires, and other obstructions
- Clear the area around the base and top of the ladder of debris, tools and other objects
- If you must use a ladder in passageways, driveways or other high-traffic areas with pedestrians or vehicles, set up suitable barricades
- If you're using a ladder in a doorway, lock the doors shut
- Place the ladder feet 1/4 of the ladder's working length away from the base of the structure (e.g., if the ladder measures 8 feet between its base and its support point at the top of a wall, there should be 2 feet between the base of the ladder and the foot of the wall)
- Rest both side rails of an extension ladder on the top support and secure the ladder to prevent slipping
- If you will be stepping onto a higher platform (e.g., a roof or scaffold) from the ladder, make sure the ladder extends at least 3 feet above that platform
- Place the feet of all ladders on a firm, level footing
- Secure the bottom of extension ladders to prevent slipping
- Have someone hold the ladder if possible, especially if the ladder doesn't have slip-resistant feet or secure blocking
- Do not set up a ladder on a box, barrel, cart, table, scaffold, ice or on any other unstable or slippery surface
- Ensure the locks on extension ladders are fully locked and that the stretchers on step ladders are fully extended and locked

Climbing a Ladder

By following these tips, you can climb with greater comfort and security:

- Grasp the rungs of the ladder, not the side rails; the rungs are easier to hold on to in case your foot slips
- Face the ladder when going up or down and when working from it
- Keep the center of your body within the side rails
- Maintain three-point contact by keeping two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand, on the ladder at all times
- Do not carry objects in your hands while on a ladder; hoist materials or attach tools to your belt

Staying on a Ladder

Adopt these rules:

- Do not work from the top three rungs of an extension ladder or the top two rungs of a step ladder
- Wear protective footwear with slip-resistant soles and heels
- Be sure the soles of footwear and ladder rungs are clear of mud or other slippery substances
- Don't straddle the space between a ladder and another object
- Don't overreach from a ladder. Step down and move the ladder as required
- Never move or shift a ladder while a person is on the ladder
- Keep your balance. Don't try to do work that will disrupt your balance or make you unstable
- Ladder climbing is strenuous. Take reasonable breaks at intervals
- Don't try to use a ladder if you feel ill, dizzy, or weak
- Climb up and down ladders slowly and deliberately

Other Safety Precautions

- Aluminum ladders are electrically conductive, so use wooden or fiberglass ladders for electrical work or for outdoor work that may be done in proximity to overhead wires
- Do not join two short ladders to make a longer ladder
- Do not use a self-supporting step or A-frame ladder as a single extension ladder or partially closed
- Do not use a ladder placed in a horizontal position as a scaffold plank or runway
- Read and follow all instructions, warnings and markings on a ladder before use
- Use only approved ladder accessories for their designed use

Contact Info:

PHONE: 888.486.7466

WEB: amtrustfinancial.com/loss-control

EMAIL: AskLC@amtrustgroup.com

AmTrust maintains this article as a service for its customers. This information is intended to give you a place to start when finding information about a particular safety question. This article is not intended to provide authoritative answers to safety and health questions. Before using the information here, the accuracy and appropriateness of the information to your specific situation should be verified by a person qualified to assess all the factors involved.

This article contains hyperlinks to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. Please be aware that we do not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of pointers to particular items in hypertext is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed or products or services offered by the author of the reference or the organization operating the site on which the reference is maintained.