

SOUND ADVICE

Ladder Safety

The American Ladder Institute recognizes Ladder Safety month because injuries involving the improper use of ladders continues to be a major concern. In celebration of this important month of safety, here are some important tips for safe ladder usage to avoid accident and injury.



Start with the Basics!

At some point, you may have used a ladder incorrectly, even if it was only something you did without consciously knowing you did. Over the years, safety administrations, employers, and ladder manufacturers alike have made it a priority to improve education regarding ladder safety to help keep others safe. Why? Because using a ladder incorrectly can come with a steep cost: injury or even death. If you are not using your ladder the right way, you put yourself and others at risk.

So, to simplify the learning curve, we have narrowed down the basics of ladder safety, which includes:

- **Having the right ladder for the job.** It is important to familiarize yourself with your ladder, its size, and its use, so you can work safer and more efficiently.
- **Maintaining three points of contact.** Typical points of contact include the hands, feet, or knees meaning you should have both feet firmly planted on the ladder, with a hand or your knees resting on the ladder for stability. When you lose your third point of contact, you are more likely to lose balance.
- **Do not overreach.** While working from a ladder, a good rule of thumb is to keep your belt buckle position between the rails. If you find that your belt buckle position is beyond the side rails, you have reached too far.
- **Maintain a 4-1 ratio.** When using an extension ladder, remember this ratio: for every four feet of ladder length, the base of the ladder needs to be pulled one foot away from the wall. This ratio keeps your ladder stable as you climb and prevents the ladder from sliding out.
- **Keep the ladder level.** If a ladder is unlevel by just 1-inch at the base, it can cause a 9-inch lean at the top of a 19-foot ladder. That is significant, especially if you are working on a ladder that is taller than that.
- **Ladder inspection.** Before using your ladder check it for dents and cracks and look at the treads on the feet of the ladder to ensure that your ladder is safe for use. A damaged ladder puts your safety at risk.
- **Electrical conductivity.** For most tasks, an aluminum ladder is ideal; however, if you are working around electricity, you need to use a fiberglass ladder instead. Unlike its aluminum counterpart, fiberglass ladders are non-conductive, making them the safer choice when working with electricity.

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- **Watch your step.** Studies have shown that 20 percent of ladder-related injuries occur from missing the final rung of the ladder. Be mindful of your footing as you descend your ladder and double-check your place on the ladder before stepping off.

Final Thoughts

If you find yourself reaching for something that is not a ladder when climbing, like a chair, shelf, or cabinet, stop and grab the proper ladder for your job. Remember, no amount of inconvenience in grabbing a different ladder is ever worth risking your safety. Your employer, your family, and your friends will thank you for it.

