

# Using Portable Ladders

Falls from ladders are a common source of falls from elevations. Ladders range from 2-foot stepladders to 72-foot, three-section extension ladders and fixed ladders that can extend hundreds of feet. Many ladders include built-in safety features; others are available as retrofits. These features include slip-resistant rungs/steps, positioning feet that fully articulate, top and bottom stabilizers, and a glide-rail system for use with a full body harness.

Several factors contribute to falls from ladders. They include ladder slip, overreaching, slipping on rungs/steps, defective equipment, and using the wrong ladder for the job. Stepladders and extension ladders have appropriate uses; using the wrong ladder for the task can increase your risk of falling.

To use a ladder safely:

- Choose the right ladder for the job. When choosing between a self-supporting ladder (stepladder) and a straight or extension ladder, consider the bottom (working) surface and the top support conditions.
- Make sure the ladder is long/tall enough to safely reach the work area; has a load rating that can support the weight of the user, materials, and tools; and has non-conductive side rails when used near energized equipment.

When using a straight or extension ladder:

- Use the ladder only on stable or level surfaces, unless the ladder is secured to prevent accidental movement.
- Extend the ladder side rails at least 3 feet above the upper landing to which the ladder is used to gain access.
- Make sure both rails maintain equal contact with the supporting structure.
- Set up the ladder so that the height-to-base ratio is 4 feet to 1 foot (for every 4 feet of length, extend the ladder from the vertical surface/wall 1 foot). For example, the feet of a 16-foot ladder should be placed 4 feet from the wall.



- Use adjustable feet to level the ladder, if applicable.
- When climbing up or down, have another person hold the ladder, or tie/stake the ladder in place at top and bottom.
- Never lean more than 12 inches beyond either side rail.
- Carry small tools and other work materials in your clothing or attached to a tool belt.
- Stop climbing when you reach the third-highest rung—it is the maximum climbing height.

When using a stepladder:

- Use a stepladder only on a solid, level surface.
- Never use a folded stepladder as a straight ladder.
- Fully extend and lock the spreaders.
- Never climb or stand on the leg braces, the top step, or on the service tray.
- Avoid using an unprotected stepladder in a doorway or in high-traffic areas.
- When working in a high-traffic area, lock or barricade doors, mark the area off, or have a co-worker monitor the area while work is underway.
- Carry small tools and other work materials in your clothing or attached to a tool belt.
- Keep all ladders free of oil, grease, and other slipping hazards.
- Use ladders only for their intended purpose.
- Do not use ladders on slippery surfaces unless the ladder is equipped with slip-resistant feet.
- Keep areas clear around the top and bottom of ladders.
- Do not move, shift, or extend ladders while using them.
- Face the ladder when moving up or down.
- Maintain 3-point contact with a ladder—two feet and one hand, or two hands and one foot, must be in contact with the ladder at all times.
- Do not carry objects or loads that could cause you to lose your balance and fall.