

Falls Are No Fun- Using Ladders & Stairs Safely

Each year there are at least 100 deaths and over 25,000 serious injuries in the American workplace due to falls while using ladders or stairs. The sad thing is that all these costly deaths could have been prevented had the worker followed the safety rules. To better inform you of safe use of ladders and stairs, here are a few worker safety guidelines that just may save your life.

With ladders, become familiar with the type ladder being used before placing it into use. All ladders are not universal items and can not be used in every work situation. Ladders manufacturers have placed safety labels on the side rails to inform the user of the maximum load capacity of each ladder step and has listed the prohibited usage, such as “Do Not Use a Metal ladder on or near electrical wires or equipment to prevent shock.” In addition, step ladders should never be used in the closed position and leaned against a wall or any other support; they should always be opened and the braces locked into place before use. And how many times have you seen coworkers stand on the top step of a step ladder to pull an order- a major No-No. Wooden ladders should never be repaired in the workplace and placed back into service; field repairs compromise the load capacity of the ladder leading to injuries from collapse.

Also, do you know the 3-point rule, no not basketball, it’s when you are climbing a ladder, stairs or entering/exiting a truck cab- you should always maintain three points of contact- 2 feet and one hand or one foot and two hands while climbing. In addition, never overload your arms with tools or product, thereby minimizing your chances of catching yourself should you slip, trip or fall. And speaking of slipping, falls from ladders or stairs occur often due to mud, grease or oil on the work boots; keep the shoes and the ladder rungs or stair steps clean at all times.

Now with stairs, make sure they are kept clean, have smooth even steps with anti-slip strips, and do not let anyone store items on them. Make sure the lighting is adequate enough to safely navigate the steps; poor lighting leads to a lot of miss-step type worker injuries. Handrails should be on both sides unless one side is enclosed and flush with the stair steps. The handrails should be smooth and mounted at least 3 inches from the wall for easy grasp. And please, check under the stairs often to make sure flammable products and fueled equipment, such as lawn mowers, high-pressure washers, etc. are not stored. In case of a fire in the area, the stairs may not be usable for evacuation if flammable products ignite.

These are just a few of the important safety guidelines to prevent falls when using ladders and stairs. Please ask your supervisor for additional information if needed, and please report immediately to management any damage to ladders or stairs, and do not use them until proper repairs are made. Always read and adhere to the safety warning guidelines printed on the ladder side-rails and user’s guide. Injury prevention is in your hands!!