



Ladders and Stepladders Standards

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1. Introduction

The purpose of these ladders and stepladders standards is to ensure that when work at height is carried out using a ladder or stepladder it is only done so where it has been identified via a working at height assessment, the right choice of ladder has been selected for the task and the worker knows how to safely use it.

2. When to use a ladder or stepladder

If the task requires staying up a leaning ladder or stepladder for 30 minutes or more at a time, or the work at height is above the top of a first floor window then alternative equipment must be considered.

Ladders should also only be used in situations where they can be used safely. For example, where the ladder will be level and stable and where it is reasonably practicable to do so, the ladder can be secured.

Only operatives who are competent, i.e. have had instruction and understand how to use a ladder safely and how to select the correct type of ladder for the task they are performing can use a ladder or stepladder.

Operatives must also ensure they are wearing appropriate personal protective equipment for the ladder and task they are carrying out.

3. Procedure when using a ladder or stepladder

3.1 Ladder Standards

The ladder must meet the current standard, EN 131 Professional.

3.2 Ladder Inspection

Ladders must have regular inspections, there are two methods for inspecting ladders:

1. Detailed visual inspections must be carried out regularly by a competent person. These inspections will be outlined in the manufacturer's instruction manual.

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2. Pre-use checks must be carried out before starting a task, and repeated every time something changes, for example, the ladder being dropped or moved to a different area.

Pre-use checks

The user must follow the checklist below as it explains some of the most important things to look for in a pre-use check:

1. Stiles must be in good condition as bent or split stiles could lead to collapse;
2. Make sure feet are not worn, damaged, dirty or missing, or else the ladder could slip;
3. Confirm the rungs are not bent, missing or loose to keep the ladder stable;
4. Make sure the locking bars work and are not bent, worn or damaged or the ladder could collapse;
5. Make sure treads are not contaminated or slippery;
6. Make sure platforms on stepladders aren't split or buckled as it may lead to instability or collapse;
7. Check steps on stepladders and make sure fixings aren't loose or else the ladder may collapse.

If the ladder is dirty then it must be cleaned. Damage can be hidden beneath all the dirt, and the dirt itself can cause the ladder to slip or for the user to slip from the ladder.

In wet weather the user should further consider the hazard of slipping from the ladder rungs and undertake a test of the first rung to ensure they cannot slip. Ladders must not be used in icy conditions.

3.3 Using a leaning ladder

The one-in-four rule ensures the user is placing the ladder at the right angle. Any leaning ladder should be at a 75 degree angle, and the simplest way to achieve this is to have the ladder one unit out from a wall for every four units up.

The user to climb the ladder using three points of contact and work in the same way wherever possible. The user should only let go of a handhold briefly, for example when starting to knock in a nail.

While climbing, the user should always be facing the ladder and gripping it firmly, and use a tool belt rather than climbing with anything in their hand.

Use the belt-buckle test to avoid overreaching to the sides. If the area where the user's belt buckle should be is outside of the stiles, the user is overreaching and should go back down and reposition the ladder. The ladder must never be adjusted while the user is on the rungs.

The user must make sure the ladder is long and high enough for the task being carried out. Stretching upwards is to be avoided, as is working from the top three rungs. The user must never stand the ladder on a moveable object, for example, pallet, bricks, tower scaffold.

The user must not overload the ladder, the workers weight as well as equipment or materials being carried must be considered. More information should be available from manufacturer's labels on the ladders themselves.

Avoid overhead power lines, do not work within six metres horizontal to one unless it has been made dead or protected with insulation. Any electrical work should involve a non-conductive ladder made of, for example, fibreglass or timber.

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The user must make sure they tie in any leaning ladder, using a strong upper resting point rather than, for example, plastic gutters, and consider using an effective stability device or have someone “foot” the ladder.

3.4 Using a stepladder

Check all four feet of the stepladder, they must all be in contact with the ground, and the steps should be level.

Only carry light tools and materials.

Do not overreach and do not stand on the top three steps to work unless a handhold is available above this point.

Ensure locking devices are engaged.

Be careful of the dangers of side loading, like drilling from the side. Aim to be facing the work area instead, unless a risk assessment advises otherwise. When a side load is likely, tie in the steps or ensure they will not tip over.

Keep three points of contact, two feet and one hand. If both hands are briefly required, use the stepladder to support your body for a third point of contact.

3.5 Using a telescopic ladder

Telescopic ladders have significantly more safety critical parts than ordinary ladders and therefore need more careful pre-use checks and more rigorous thorough inspections at frequent intervals. Telescopic ladders can be damaged by impact or through poor conditions of transport, use or storage.

All ladders conforming to BS EN 131 must be supplied with a full set of user instructions. If the user doesn't have them, then the supplier must be contacted for a replacement set.

All the basic rules for ladder use apply just the same to telescopic ladders:

- Before first use, inspect the ladder thoroughly, it may have been damaged before bought or hired it, or during shipment.
- If the ladder is dropped, or following any event which may have similarly jeopardised its safety, then the user should carry out a thorough inspection before using the ladder again.
- If any of the tubes forming the sides of the ladder are damaged, then the ladder may be difficult to operate and may not lock properly. Damage to the sides or rungs can create a weakness that may result in a ladder failing under load.

If the user finds anything which is damaged or not working exactly as it should, or which they are just not sure about, then don't use the ladder, contact the supplier for advice.

4. Monitoring

Site management monitors the safe use of ladders via daily site checks. The Group HS&E Department monitors compliance with these standards via regular site HS&E inspections.

5. Further reading

[LAA/HSE-Ladders-and-Stepladders-A-brief-guide.pdf](#)

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<https://ladderassociation.org.uk/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/ladders.htm>

6. **Tool Box Talk**

Refer to HSMS [TBT](#) – W@H Ladders and Stepladders

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