



Working at Height - Ladders & Stepladders

Audience: Site Operatives, Sales Staff, Office Staff, Customer Care Operatives

Presenter: GHSEA, Site Manager, department Heads, Office Managers



When to use a ladder

Ladders can be a sensible and practical option for low risk and short duration tasks, but they shouldn't automatically be your first choice. Use a ladder when your risk assessment has shown that other equipment (providing a higher level of fall protection) is not justified, and that a ladder can be used safely.



Short duration

As a guide, 'short duration' is a task that requires you to be working from a ladder for no more than 30 minutes at a time. If the task will take longer, it is recommended to use alternative work at height equipment.



Things to consider

- Only adequately trained people should use a ladder or stepladder
- Before use, check that the ladder is not damaged in anyway.
- Leaning ladders must be positioned at an angle of 75 degrees or 1 in 4.
- Keep at least one hand on the ladder when climbing and working.
- Maintain three points of contact with the ladder wherever possible.
- Never carry materials or tools when climbing a ladder
- Use tool belts and other methods to position materials or equipment.
- Do not rest a leaning ladder on gutters, tiles and trees as these might give way. You may need a 'stand-off device'?
- Do not avoid over reach
- Avoid side-on working as that force could cause the ladder to topple.
- Face the task and never work facing backwards.



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Select the right ladder

There are various types of ladders available on the market. The most common are Leaning Ladders, Stepladders, Step Stools, Combination Ladders, Multi Hinge Joint Ladders, Telescopic Ladders, Mobile Ladders with a Platform and Roof Ladders.

Consider the task you are carrying out to determine the most appropriate type of ladder to use, as certain types of ladders may be more suitable for your task.



Select the right class of ladder

There are two classes of ladder; Professional and Non-Professional.

Only use 'Professional' ladders at work that meet the current standard EN 131. Never use 'Non-Professional' or 'Class 3' ladders at work



Select the right material

Ladders are made of materials including aluminium, steel, wood and fibreglass. Each material has properties that make the ladder suitable for some applications and unsuitable for others.

- Aluminium - lightweight, easy to move and position. Do not use near electricity - they are very good conductors of electricity so increases the risk of electrical shock.
- Steel - heavy, more difficult to move around, but very durable. As with aluminium ladders do not use near electricity.
- Wood & Fibreglass - keep ladders well clear of live electrical equipment, particularly high voltage overhead cables. If the work is unavoidable and you need to use a ladder, use one made of fibreglass or wood, and keep them clean and dry.



Select the right height

Always choose a ladder long enough for the job - don't over reach and never try to gain extra height by standing you or your ladder on bricks, boxes etc.

Leaning ladders - do not stand on the last 3 rungs.

Stepladders - never use as a leaning ladder in the closed position. On a stepladder without a platform, do not stand on the top tread or the two treads below. Never stand on a hand or knee rail.

Combination ladders - on three-part combination ladders in stepladder mode, do not stand on the top four rungs.



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Securing a ladder

There are four main ways you can secure your ladder. In order of priority, these are:

Tying in

Tie the ladder to a suitable secure point, making sure both stiles are tied. You can tie in at the top or near the base, or both.

Tying in is the first, most effective and preferred option for preventing a ladder from slipping: Make sure the ties are strong enough for the task; strong rope, webbing straps, certain nylon ties or purpose-made devices are good options.

Ties should be tight enough to sufficiently prevent movement of the ladder.

Always fix the ties around both sides (stiles) of the ladder and never tie onto a rung or tread.

Only tie-in to a secure fixing. This could be existing features (as long as you know they're secure), or you might need to fit anchors to tie into. Whatever you do, DO NOT tie into, or rest the ladder against, weak surfaces like plastic guttering, drainpipes or glazing.

There may be times when you need to tie in a stepladder - before you do, ask yourself if it's the most appropriate choice of equipment for the job. If yes, fix the ties carefully, and never tie onto a tread.

Use a ladder stability device

When used correctly, these devices may help to prevent a ladder from slipping.

Wedging your ladder

If it's not possible to tie a ladder and you can't find a suitable stability device, the next option to you is to securely wedge your ladder (e.g. wedge the stiles against a wall). But remember to position it at the correct angle and close to the work to avoid over reaching.

Footing

If you can't use any of the options above, foot the ladder. Footing is the last resort as it is the least effective way of preventing a ladder slipping

Footing is of limited benefit for stabilising a ladder, but it is commonplace. If no other securing methods are available and you must foot the ladder, use either of these two options:

Option 1 - one foot in the centre of the bottom rung, with the other foot behind you on the ground, and hands firmly on each stile at shoulder height.

Option 2 - each foot hard against each stile, with hands firmly on each stile at shoulder height.

Do not stand on the bottom rung with both feet.