

TOOLBOX TALK #32

COMMON LADDER MISTAKES – PART 1



Everyone on the jobsite uses ladders. But are they using them safely? Here are some common mistakes we find in the field of construction. We will list more in Part 2.

Not determining if a ladder is the safest equipment for the job

In certain cases, it might be best to use a different piece of equipment. For example, a scissors lift can allow workers to use both hands, or the lift can move people more efficiently from spot to spot during a job. This is why it's important to perform a job hazard or task hazard analysis to determine which equipment is the safest option for the task.

Not choosing the right ladder

One example: Selecting a ladder that's too short can cause workers to climb to an unsafe level to reach something. Another: Anyone working near powerlines shouldn't use a ladder made of conductive material such as aluminum. Instead, they should choose one made of nonconductive materials such as wood or fiberglass.

Failing to inspect a ladder before use

It's vital to catch issues like broken rungs or other damage beforehand. If a ladder is damaged, OSHA requires employers to place a "Do Not Use" tag or a tag with similar language, on the ladder and take it out of service. Also, make sure the ladder is free of mud, snow or other debris that could cause a worker to slip or fall.

Not knowing the proper angle

When placing a ladder against the wall or any other kind of vertical surface, it should be set up at a proper angle, according to OSHA. To do so, set the base a quarter "of the working length of the ladder" away from the wall or vertical surface. So, if it's a four-foot ladder, place it one foot away from the wall. If it's an 8-foot ladder, place it 2 feet away from the wall and so on. This way, the ladder will be at an optimal 75-degree angle.

Not using at least 3 points of contact

Three points of contact is generally accepted as two feet and one hand or two hands and one foot. Those three points of contact will help maintain stability while on the ladder and provide a safeguard against the most hazardous situation: falls from height.

Check out Part 2 for more common ladder mistakes.