

Accidents involving ladders are very common. Most of these accidents could have been avoided with proper ladder use. While a ladder is a very basic necessity and seems easy to use, it is often one of the most misused and abused pieces of equipment we see during site inspections.

An accident involving a ladder can result in a very serious injury or possibly even death. Here are the 10 most common causes of ladder accidents and simple solutions to prevent such accidents from happening:

1. Failure to secure a straight ladder. Always secure a straight ladder at the top so that it won't be able to move in ANY direction. Also ensure that the bottom of the ladder is equipped with the proper slip resistant feet.
2. Standing on the top 2 steps of a stepladder. If employees are standing on the top 2 steps of a stepladder, a taller stepladder should be used. Supply the appropriate sized ladders for the job.
3. Over-reaching while working from a ladder. Employees working from a ladder should not over reach or lean too far while working from a ladder but rather reposition the ladder. Employees should keep their belt buckle between the side rails of the ladders. (see #9 regarding repositioning ladders)
4. Carrying items up or down a ladder. Employees should always maintain 3 points of contact when climbing up or down ladders -- 2 hands- 1 foot, 1 hand – 2 feet. Using a rope to lift hoist items instead of carrying them.
5. Metal ladders coming into contact with overhead electrical lines. Metal ladders need to be kept a minimum of 10ft. from energized overhead lines that are rated 50kV or less. Add 4" for every 10kV above 50kV. Unless your 100% certain the voltage of the lines, a rule of thumb would be to maintain a minimum of 20ft clearances.
6. Access ladders not extended to proper height. All access ladders need to be set up so that the ladder extends a minimum 3ft above the landing area. This allows for a handhold getting on or off the ladder. Again, supply the appropriate sized ladder for the job.
7. Setting up a ladder at an improper pitch. Straight ladders need to be placed at a 4-1 pitch. For every 4ft up a ladder goes, the bottom of the ladder needs to come out 1ft. from the base. So if a ladder is set up 20ft, the bottom of the ladder should be 5ft. out from the base.
8. Using damaged or defective ladders. Any damaged or defective ladders should be tagged and removed from service immediately. If a ladder will be disposed of, be certain that it is cut up so that other employees or another trade can't use it.
9. Repositioning ladders while still on them. Employees should not "jump" a ladder to reposition it but rather climb down and reposition it.
10. Working from a closed stepladder that is leaned against a surface. Stepladders should only be used in the full open position and ensure that the spreader bars are locked into position. A leaned stepladder can slip out from under you.

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