



# TOOLBOX TALK



## LADDER SAFETY CHOOSING THE RIGHT LADDER

### Always choose the correct ladder for the job or task to be performed.

Because ladders are the only access equipment with no fall protection, falls from ladders cause the highest number of serious injuries and deaths from access equipment every year. The two main causes of those falls from ladders are:

- The wrong ladder and
- Abusing the equipment (often because it was the wrong kind of ladder).

The first question to ask is should I upgrade from a ladder to a scaffold or MEWP. Ladders have height limitations and only allow a limited amount of load, force (pushing against the wall, etc.), and reach (typically between the shoulders).

If a ladder is appropriate for the work, then it is critical the ladder used to access any given position is tall enough for the task at hand. Stepping onto the top rungs causes falls. Similarly, ladders that are not long enough to extend 3 feet above an upper level for exit / entrance purposes cause falls. Overloading can collapse the system (remember that heavy duty ladders are the only equipment with less than a 4:1 safety factor). Therefore the second question to ask yourself is if the ladder is tall enough and strong enough for what you need it to do?

There are many types of ladders, ranging from simple wooden job-built ladders to specialty ladders used for specific jobs. Ladders may be made of timber, aluminum, or fiberglass. There are three main types of ladders used in the construction industry:

- Extension
- Step
- Multi-purpose

Keep the following in mind when choosing the right ladder for your job:

- For indoor use, stepladders or multi-purpose ladders are usually recommended.
- For outdoor work, taller stepladders, multi-purpose, or extension ladders are generally more appropriate.
- Do not use aluminum ladders when working around electricity. Choose a ladder made out of non-conductive material for electrical work, such as when working near overhead power lines.
- Make sure that the ladder is the proper length to do the job safely.

TYPE	WEIGHT RATING	DUTY RATING
1-AA	375 pounds	Super Heavy Duty
1-A	300 pounds	Extra Heavy Duty
1	250 pounds	Heavy Duty Industrial
2	225 pounds	Medium Duty Commercial
3	200 pounds	Light Duty Household

### DISCUSSION LEADER DUTIES:

Obtain a ladder that you or an employee can use during the discussion to demonstrate key points.

### WHAT THIS TOOLBOX TALK COVERS:

This toolbox talk reviews how to choose the correct type of ladder.

### DISCUSSION NOTES:

Emphasize the importance of choosing the right ladder for the job. Note that more than 150 fatal falls occur in workplaces each year.

- Choose a ladder that is designed for how you intend to use it. For example, do not select a step ladder for use in a folded or leaned position in place of a straight ladder.
- Choose a ladder that is capable of supporting your weight and the weight of any materials you will be using. See the chart to the right.

***All access equipment requires a visual inspection prior to every use – especially ladders.  
Never use damaged equipment!***

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the main type of ladders?

**Answer:** Extension, step, and multi-purpose.

2. What ladders are good to use around electricity?

**Answer:** Fiberglass.

3. When are aluminum ladder not appropriate for use?

**Answer:** When working with electricity.



**OSHA Standard**  
No. 1926.1053  
Choosing Ladders Guide

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