



Ladder/Step Safety Training

Introduction

Following this guidance will ensure compliance with the Work at Height Regulations 2005 (WAHR). Ladders and stepladders are not banned under health and safety law. In fact they can be a sensible and practical option for low-risk, short-duration tasks, although they may not automatically be your first choice. Make sure you use the right type of ladder and you know how to use it safely.

When is a ladder the most suitable equipment?

When a risk assessment has shown that using equipment offering a higher level of fall protection is not justified because of the low risk and short duration of use; or there are existing workplace features which cannot be altered. **As a guide, alternative equipment should be considered if the duration of the task will be greater than 30 minutes. ALWAYS ATTEMPT TO USE HIGH REACH TOOLS FROM THE GROUND BEFORE RESORTING TO THE USE OF LADDERS.**

You should only use ladders in situations where they can be used safely, eg where **the ladder will be level and stable**, and where it is reasonably practicable to do so, the ladder can be secured. Please note that for some applications, a single step may be suitable, but this is only where no reaching or extending is required as there are no handles available to maintain three points of contact. This should only be for short periods of time.

Check your ladder before you use it

Before starting a task, you should always carry out a 'pre-use' check to spot any obvious visual defects to make sure the ladder is safe to use.

You should carry out a pre-use check:

- At the beginning of the working day
- After something has changed, eg a ladder has been dropped or moved from a dirty area to a clean area (check the state or condition of the feet).

Check the stiles – make sure they are not bent or damaged, as the ladder could buckle or collapse.

Check the feet – if they are missing, worn or damaged the ladder could slip. Also check ladder feet when moving from soft/dirty ground (eg dug soil, loose sand/ stone, a dirty workshop) to a smooth, solid surface (eg paving slabs), to make sure the foot material and not the dirt (eg soil, chippings or embedded stones) is making contact with the ground.

Check the rungs – if they are bent, worn, missing or loose the ladder could fail. **Check any locking mechanisms** – if they are bent or the fixings are worn or damaged the ladder could collapse. Ensure any locking bars are engaged.

Check the stepladder platform – if it is split or buckled the ladder could become unstable or collapse.

Check the steps or treads on stepladders – if they are contaminated they could be slippery; if the fixings are loose on steps, they could collapse.

If you spot any of the above defects, don't use the ladder and notify your manager or the office. Don't use the ladders until defects have been rectified

Use your stepladders safely

- Check all four stepladder feet are in contact with the ground and the steps are level;
- Only carry light materials and tools;
- Don't overreach;
- Don't stand and work on the top three steps (including a step forming the very top of the stepladder) unless there is a suitable handhold;
- Ensure any locking devices are engaged;
- Try to position the stepladder to face the work activity and not side on. However, there are occasions when a risk assessment may show it is safer to work side on, eg in a retail stock room when you can't engage the stepladder locks to work face on because of space restraints in narrow aisles, but you can fully lock it to work side on; try to avoid work that imposes a side loading, such as side-on drilling through solid materials (eg bricks or concrete); where side-on loadings cannot be avoided, you should prevent the steps from tipping over, eg by tying the steps. Otherwise, use a more suitable type of access equipment; maintain three points of contact at the working position. This means two feet and one hand,

or when both hands need to be free for a brief period, two feet and the body supported by the stepladder (see diagram right, and associated text).

When deciding if it is safe to carry out a particular task on a stepladder where you cannot maintain a handhold (eg to put a box on a shelf, hang wallpaper, install a smoke detector on a ceiling), this needs to be justified, taking into account:

- The height of the task;
- Whether a handhold is still available to steady yourself before and after the task;
- Whether it is light work;
- Whether it avoids side loading;
- Whether it avoids overreaching;
- Whether the stepladder can be tied (eg when side-on working.)



✓ Example where two hands need to be free for a brief period for light work. Keep two feet on the same step and the body (knees or chest) supported by the stepladder to maintain three points of contact. Make sure a safe handhold is available

Where to use your ladders

As a guide, only use a ladder:

- On firm ground;
- On level ground – refer to the manufacturer’s pictograms on the side of the ladder. Use proprietary levelling devices, not ad-hoc packing such as bricks, blocks, timbers etc;
- On clean, solid surfaces (paving slabs, floors etc). These need to be clean (no oil, moss or leaf litter) and free of loose material (sand, packaging materials etc) so the feet can grip. Shiny floor surfaces can be slippery even without contamination;
- Where they will not be struck by vehicles (protect the area using suitable barriers or cones);

Items covered

- When to use ladders
- How to check ladders before use
- How to use ladders safely
- Where to use ladders