WEEK 11 MARCH · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

Ladder Safety

Ladders are a common piece of equipment on the worksite and they are easy to use incorrectly.

The hazard

Most ladder falls come from the same handful of causes: the ladder wasn't secured, it was set at the wrong angle, it was the wrong ladder, or someone reached instead of moving it. A short fall onto rebar, forms, or a hard slab does as much damage as a long one.

What to do

- **Use a ladder built for a project.** Portable ladders on site have to meet the Grade 1, 1A, or 1AA requirements of the CSA portable-ladder standard, and be used the way the manufacturer says. The light-duty one from home doesn't belong here.
- **Secure it** A ladder used to get from one level to another has to be **secured at both the top and the bottom** so it can't move, with a clear landing surface at each end.
- **Get the angle right when it isn't tied off.** For a leaning ladder that isn't secured, the base sits between a quarter and a third of the ladder's length out from the wall. Once it's properly secured, the securing is what's holding it.
- **Extend it at least 900 mm above the landing** — enough to hold onto at the step-off.
- Set it on firm, level footing, and check the ladder before you climb: rungs, rails, feet, and locks.
- **Three points of contact, facing the ladder, hands free.** Belt buckle between the rails. Move the ladder instead of reaching — the reach is what tips it.
- **On a stepladder, don't stand on the top cap, the top step, or the pail shelf.** Legs fully spread, spreaders locked.
- **Near electrical work, the ladder is not the control.** De-energize, or keep the required clearance from the conductors. A clean, dry non-conductive ladder is only used where the electrical plan allows anyone to be working there at all — fibreglass doesn't make an encroachment safe, and a wet or dirty one can conduct.
- Don't lash two ladders together to get length unless the manufacturer's instructions actually permit it.

Watch out for

- Cracked rungs, bent rails, missing feet, or grease on the steps — tag it and take it out of service.
- A ladder "just leaned there for a minute" unsecured.
- A stepladder not being tall enough to reach the task at hand without using the top step.
- A job that's really a scaffold or a platform job being done off a ladder because the ladder was closer or easier.

Talk it over

- When did we last actually inspect the ladders in the truck — and is anything on today's list overdue?
- Which of today's tasks should be on a scaffold or a lift instead of a ladder?

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