

Health and Safety

for congregations

Performing tasks at heights and ladder safety



How this guide can help you

Each year dozens of serious incidents occur where people fall from ladders. The most common falls occur when people are doing building maintenance, other construction work, or working in retail. You may be surprised to find out that most fatalities using ladders are from heights less than 3m. An awareness of the dangers related to using ladders and the measures that can be undertaken to prevent harm is therefore paramount. This guide provides helpful information about how to safely use ladders to avoid injury.

Ladder injuries

The most common causes of ladder injuries are caused by:

- Incorrect ladder selection
- Not checking the ladder is safe before use
- Improper ladder use, activities such as overreaching, using the ladder as a work platform and carrying objects up and down
- Misstep, or misjudging the location of the steps

Before using a ladder

Never substitute another method when a ladder is required – such as climbing on a shelf or a chair. It is best to work from ground level whenever possible so eliminating or reducing the need for higher work should always be the goal. Start by questioning the need to get up so high; be organised and use lower shelves as a priority for frequently accessed items.

Ladders should only be used for short periods (say 30 minutes), other alternatives should be sought for accessing heights for longer term use. Never use a ladder if you have a medical condition which may impact your ability to use a ladder safely. Remember your balance can be impacted if you are pregnant. Our balance can also deteriorate with age, it is important to be realistic about what tasks you can perform safely.

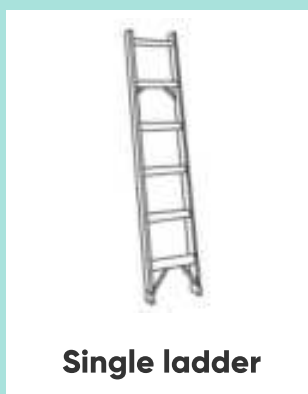
Selecting the right ladder

Some of us might not realise the difference between one ladder and the next. Not all ladders are appropriate for each task. Depending on the specific task and how it is carried out, platform ladders should provide an improved level of fall protection over other common ladders, as they include a small working platform and a partial handrail. When you need to stand on a ladder (not just use it for access), platform ladders can often be the best option.

Some common ladders are shown below:



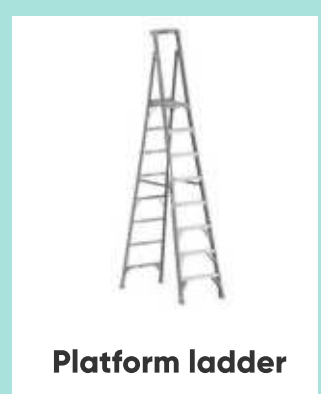
A-frame



Single ladder



Extension ladder



Platform ladder

Ladder height

When selecting the right ladder for the job, you need to consider the height that you will be working at and the height that you can safely reach. The average reach height for an adult is around 30 cm. When selecting the right platform ladder height, consider the height of the platform shelf. For a platform ladder it is important that you do not go above the top ladder shelf. For other ladders, never climb or work past the second-last rung from the top, or whatever is indicated on the ladder itself.

Load rating

Ladders are designed and constructed to safely hold a specific amount of weight. All ladders should meet Australian Standards and be rated industrial strength. Make sure you check the label. They should also have a minimum load limit of 120 kgs. When selecting the right ladder, a person's fully clothed weight plus the weight of any materials carried up and down the ladder must be less than the maximum load rating.



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Ladder construction

Ladders are typically made from aluminium or wood. Never use aluminium ladders near electricity.

Pre-use check

To ensure the safety of those using a ladder and those around us, a safety check should be performed before each use or when something changes i.e. it is dropped.

We must check for:

- Missing or damaged components
- Missing bolts or rivets
- The ladder feet for excessive wear and tear, if they are worn or damaged the ladder could slip
- The ladder stiles/steps/ treads are straight and not damaged
- The rungs; make sure they are not bent, worn, missing lose or damaged
- The spreaders are in good order - they must be able to fully straighten
- The ladder is free from dust, water, grease and corrosion
- Make sure the working parts move properly and that all connections are secure
- If it is a platform ladder, ensure the platform is not cracked, buckled, or bent
- If the ladder has wheels, you must always check they are clean and can move freely and lock securely

If you need to clean the ladder, use mild soapy water and ensure it is dry before use.

Positioning and setting up ladders for use

When positioning and setting up ladders:

- Be sure that the ladder's feet are firm and on level ground. Solid footing is necessary for safe ladder use
- If you are using an A-frame ladder or a platform ladder, ensure there is enough room so that it is fully open. Ladders should always be set up in the fully opened position
- If you're using an extension ladder, secure it at the top, bottom or both. If this isn't possible then have someone hold the ladder in place while in use
- Extension ladders and single ladders should be angled at a ratio of 1:4. That is, position the base of the ladder 1 metre away from the structure for every 4 metres of height
- Ensure the floor where the ladder will be placed is clean, even and not slippery or wet
- Do not set up a ladder where it can be pushed over by doors or windows
- Do not set up the ladder near children or where people are required to walk underneath it
- Never leave the ladder unattended
- If the ladder has wheels, make sure these are locked into position before you use
- Wherever possible tie off the ladder, or use ladder roof hooks or brackets

Safe use of ladders

Ladders are common tools, so many people assume they know how to climb safely, when in fact they may not.

When using a ladder:

- Always position the ladder so that you are facing the task
- Always maintain three points of contact when climbing or descending the ladder. This means two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand
- Climb up and down facing the ladder. Centre your body between the rails. Maintain a firm grip
- When climbing down, remain facing the ladder and climb to the bottom rung before stepping off
- Never hurry or skip steps. Always move one step at a time, firmly setting one foot before moving the other
- Only take small items up or down a ladder - never large or heavy items. Only carry items that allow you to maintain three points of contact
- Ladders should be regularly inspected and maintained by a competent person in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations

Training and instruction

Staff, volunteers and contractors must be provided with information and training on how to use ladders safely. You should only allow them to use a ladder if they have been trained on how to inspect, set up and use ladders.

