

LADDERS LAST

BY TREVOR ADDISON, MS, ATC

There's a common saying on safety-conscious construction sites: "ladders last." This means ladders should only be used when all other options have been exhausted. This idea doesn't eliminate the use of ladders, far from it in fact, but it does get workers to consider other ways to do their job when they can't do it from ground level. But why all the hate on ladders?

According to the CDC, in 2020, almost 23,000 workplace injuries involved the use of a ladder. If you've spent enough time using ladders on the job or at home, that statistic might not come as a shock. Ladders have no safety barricade, no harnessing system, and no safety redundancies. They also tend to invite misuse.


THE TIPPING POINT

Picture someone installing crown molding in a house. The farther they reach to the left and right, the fewer times they need to climb down, move the ladder, and then climb back up, meaning they are incentivized to push the limits of safe use to complete the job easier and faster, and the line between far and too far is blurry at best. What if the surface they're putting the ladder on is just a little uneven? How uneven is too uneven? Are workers expected to pull out a laser level along with the ladder?

You can understand why many jobsites want to prioritize scissor/boom lifts or scaffolding over ladders. However, when a ladder *is* the right (or only) tool for the job, it's crucial to use it safely and correctly.

That's where these key **Ladder Safety Dos and Don'ts** come into play. Check out the quick reference guide to the right.



When ladders are used safely, they're an essential and effective tool. But cutting corners (even small ones) can create significant risks. **Evaluate Your Equipment**, follow ladder safety best practices, and stay steady from the ground up. 

LADDER SAFETY

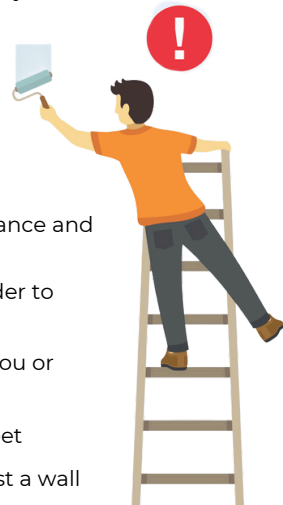
DO

- 1 Maintain 3 points of contact on the ladder:
-2 feet & 1 hand
-2 hands & 1 foot
- 2 Place the step ladder on level, solid, and unmovable ground
- 3 Face the ladder when ascending or descending
- 4 Stay centered on the ladder
- 5 Fully open the ladder and lock supports in place
- 6 Brace yourself with your free hand if possible
- 7 Carry tools in a toolbelt or pouch (not your hands)
- 8 Use the RIGHT height of ladder for the job
- 9 Inspect the ladder fully before use



DON'T

- 1 Don't overreach (causing a loss of balance and potential fall)
- 2 Do not use the top 2 rungs of the ladder to step on (it can collapse under you)
- 3 Don't move or shift the ladder while you or someone is on it.
- 4 Don't use a ladder without non-slip feet
- 5 Don't fold up and lean a ladder against a wall or surface



Trevor Addison, MS, ATC || Trevor is a Certified Athletic Trainer who has been practicing since 2015, transitioning from athletics to the industrial setting in 2019. As an avid outdoorsman and craft beer lover, if he's not in the clinic, you'll find him on a trail, slope, or at a local brewery!



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