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Ladder Safety – “Taking a Fresh Look”

From time to time it is a good idea to step back and evaluate our safety guidelines with respect to all elements of project safety. Ladders are an integral part of completing certain tasks and their use should be well-thought out.

Falls from ladders in the construction industry have resulted in a significant number of serious and fatal injuries, even when working at relatively low heights. You can eliminate or significantly reduce the risk of these incidents occurring by proper planning and evaluating the hazards.

While ladders are often considered to be the first option when working at heights, they should only be used if safer alternatives such as scaffold, rolling scaffold or elevated work platforms (Scissor/Man Lifts) have been considered. These alternatives may not be feasible for the task.

Ask yourself the question - Is a ladder the right tool for the job?

Portable ladders are one of the least stable but most commonly used tools for working at heights. Unlike passive fall prevention devices (i.e., scaffold, elevated work platforms or guardrails), portable ladders require users to be more vigilant about the risk of falling when working at heights.

Before choosing to use a ladder, you must identify whether a ladder offers the highest level of protection that is reasonably practicable.

Step Ladders:

- Step ladders cannot be used as a lean-to ladder.
- Step ladders should be secured when used for access/egress.
- Inspect the ladder prior to use.
- Do not step on the top cap or the step below the top cap.
- Place the ladder on a level, firm surface before climbing.
- Do not place planks on ladder.
- Do not use the x-bracing on the rear section of step ladder for climbing. Make sure that the ladder is properly set up and that the spreaders are in the locked position before use.
- Your feet must be on the ladder step at all times while climbing or working.
- “Tie-off” when working outside the footprint of step or extension ladders. If the work you are performing requires movement outside of the ladder rails (the use of hand/power tools) or you will be working at heights for an extended period of time, set-up a fall protection system with the use of a full-body harness, 100% tie-off lanyard or retractable lanyard (yo-yo) combination and anchor to the structure.
- Do not carry equipment while climbing a step ladder. Rope them up in a bucket/bag or have a fellow employee hand you tools or materials.
- Report any unsafe ladders to your supervisor.

Extension Ladders:

- Extend ladder side rails at least 3 ft. above the landing or use ladder extensions.
- Use the 4 in 1 Principle when setting up the ladder.
- Extension ladders should always be tied – off.
- “Tie-off” when working outside the footprint of step or extension ladders. If the work you are performing requires movement outside of the ladder rails (the use of hand/power tools) or you will be working at heights for an extended period of time, set-up a fall protection system with the use of a full-body harness, 100% tie-off lanyard or retractable lanyard (yo-yo) combination and anchor to the structure.
- Inspect the ladder prior to use.
- Face the ladder while climbing and descending.
- Do not stand on the top three rungs of the ladder.
- Do not carry equipment while climbing an extension ladder. Rope them up in bucket/ bag or have a fellow employee hand you tools or materials.
- Never move a ladder when standing on it. Always make sure that workers and equipment are off the ladder before moving it.
- Report any unsafe ladders to your supervisor.