



Falls are a persistent hazard found in all occupational settings and ladders are often a primary contributor to the cause. Employees use ladders in the workplace for many different tasks such as gaining access to higher shelves, changing a light bulb, reaching items, and in all types of construction work. Ladders are so convenient and commonplace that they are often taken for granted.

Per the National Institute on Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), approximately 20% of work related fall injuries involve ladders. Among construction workers, an estimated 81% of fall injuries treated in U.S. emergency rooms involve a ladder.

Prior to purchasing a ladder, employers should consider the type of work or task that needs to be accomplished. For example: in a retail setting where there is a daily need to access higher shelves, it would be safer to choose a rolling ladder with handrails and stairs, enabling workers to carry items with ease. In an industrial or manufacturing setting where employees need to be elevated while working around machinery or equipment, elevated platforms, lifts or scaffolds should be used in lieu of step ladders to eliminate fatigue concerns.

Other points to consider to prevent injuries stemming from the use of a ladder:

1. Plan and design the work area or tasks to eliminate the need for ladders whenever possible (e.g., avoid storing items on the top shelves if not necessary).
2. Provide alternative safer equipment for extended work at elevation, such as aerial lifts, industrial platforms, or supported scaffolds.

3. Select ladders that are well-matched to employee weight, height, task, and location. All ladders have a type duty rating with a work load (such as IA industrial extra heavy with a 300 lbs. maximum). The weight capacity should never be exceeded. An employee's weight and tools/equipment combined should fall below the capacity rating.
4. Provide proper accessories (when applicable) to supplement safe ladder use such as towlines and tool belts to ensure the employee is maintaining three points of contact.
5. Wear the proper footwear while working on a ladder. Instead of leather soles or sandals, a slip resistant sturdy work shoe should be worn.
6. Provide adequate ladder safety information and training for employees.
7. Inspect all ladders on a regular basis to ensure rails, steps, braces, etc. are in good condition. If they are defective, ladders should be destroyed and properly disposed of.

Familiarity and compliance with the provisions of safety regulations, such as recognizing ladder types and conditions and using ladder positioning and other safe ladder practices, are crucial to reducing injuries from ladder falls.

NIOSH offers a free app for mobile devices (iPhone/iPad or Android) called Ladder Safety. The app features a multimodal indicator and a graphic-oriented guide for ladder selection, inspection, positioning, accessorizing, and safe use. The app is available in both English and Spanish.

For additional assistance or questions, please contact your Risk Control Consultant or e-mail RiskControl@servicelloyds.com