



Falls remain one of the leading causes of workplace injuries and fatalities, and many of these incidents involve ladders. Each year, there are more than 300 ladder-related deaths and over 130,000 emergency room visits related to ladders. Ladders are an essential tool that can be used in every workplace, but they present serious risks when not selected, positioned, or used properly. A moment of inattention, an unstable surface, or improper setup can result in fractures, head injuries, lost time, and costly claims. Practicing proper ladder safety by choosing the right ladder for the task, inspecting it before use, maintaining three points of contact, and following manufacturer and OSHA guidelines will help protect employees from preventable injuries and supports a safer, more productive workplace.

The Top Safety Tips While Climbing Ladders

By **Teddy Durgin**

Maybe you've gone up that ladder 100 times. Well, that 101st time is no time to get lax when it comes to personal safety. That could be the time you juggle too much, misstep, and suffer an injury. It has happened to the most experienced climber. But there are some steps you can take to make climbing safe each and every time.

Michael Van Bree, Director of Product Safety and Engineering at Louisville Ladder, states, "It starts with facing the ladder! Let's make sure we face the ladder and that we have a firm grip on the ladder. Don't have your hands distracted with other materials. You want to make sure you are maintaining good contact and control with your hands and feet as you climb. Keep your hands free by, for example, using a tool belt or some other means to get your materials to the elevated work surface. A material lift or a tag line or rope will do in getting your equipment to the roof or wherever safely."

Chad Lingerfelt, National Safety Training Manager for WernerCo, also talked safety tips. "Once you are climbing the ladder," he said, "your belt buckle should be inside the rails. That's the key thing. If you keep your belt buckle inside the rails, that is the safest thing you can do in terms of keeping your center of balance on that ladder while climbing it. And if it's a step ladder, do *not* step on the last two steps as you climb."

David Francis, National Safety Director for Little Giant Ladder Systems, LLC, agreed. He added, "Indeed, keep your belt buckle between the side rails of the ladder. We don't want people grabbing and reaching and trying to get more distance out of their set-up. If you can't reach with your body between the side rails, stop what you are doing, move your ladder over, and then climb back up."

Lingerfelt's colleague Stacy Gardella, Vice President of Brand Marketing for Illinois-based WernerCo, also spoke on the three points of contact that a ladder climber must maintain. The three

points of contact means two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand on the ladder while climbing. She remarked, "DIYers don't get on ladders quite as often as those on job sites. So, they forget the rules or they do unnecessary reaching. A lot of the new products coming out like podium ladders, you can use your waist as the third point of contact because they have guard rails."

Finally, there is the little, but still very important matter of coming back down and getting off the ladder. Lingerfelt concluded, "The No. 1 incident that leads to so many injuries is missing the last step. We've had more issues of people getting hurt like that than any other. You're in a hurry. You're not thinking about it. And you just miss it, that last step."

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P.O. Box 167 • Watkinsville, Georgia 30677
3001 Monroe Hwy., Bldg. 700A • Bogart, Georgia 30622
855/753-0016 • 678/753-0016 • Fax 678/753-0056
www.agritrust.biz