

## TOOLBOX TALK #41

### STEPLADDER SAFETY

#### *How do I maintain 3 points of contact when working from a stepladder?*

The answer to this is easy.... What does the OSHA standard say? The problem, however, is that the OSHA standard isn't clear. It says, "Each employee shall use at least one hand to grasp the ladder when progressing up and/or down the ladder." The standard only addresses what to do when moving up or down the ladder, not what you should do when you stop to work. It's clear to most people that the only reason you would be climbing an A-frame or stepladder is to do something. That "something" usually will require you to use both hands.

#### **The safe interpretation**

So, how do you get the work done and maintain 3 points of contact? Most workers lean their bodies into the ladder to maintain balance, using their hip or stomach as the third point of contact. The European standard provides a little more detail. It states, "Keep two feet on the same step and the body (knees or chest) supported by the stepladder to maintain three points of contact." Although this standard is a helpful guideline, workers still may have issues because some companies have a more restrictive definition of three points in their safety policies. Many safety professionals say their workers need both hands to work while on a ladder, they need to be tied off from above. This rule might sound like a best practice, but it can cause some problems in its practical application. The climber would need not only a proper harness and lanyard, but also a certified anchor point with a safe way to connect to it without adding risk. Chances are there aren't many spots with proper anchor points available to keep this rule, which leads to operators working in unsafe positions.

#### **A solution**

A new trend in the ladder industry provides a solution. Platform ladders with built-in guardrail systems can be a safe alternative to tying off. The platform provides a more comfortable surface to work from and the guardrail fulfills the need for fall protection without relying on non-existent anchor points. These ladders, often made from non-conductive fiberglass, are climbed maintaining 3 points of contact. Once the user steps through the one-way gates at the top, he or she does not need to be tied off and can work with both hands. These ladders allow the worker to operate in a fully enclosed work platform quickly and safely with two hands while still complying with industry regulations.

Always remember to climb safely!

