

## TOOLBOX TALK #42

### FOUR PRINCIPLES OF LADDER SAFETY

Every trade faces specific challenges with ladder safety, and it is easy to get lost in the weeds when training workers to avoid dangers. There are basically four key principles that can help every company prevent incidents and ensure that people go home safely each night. These are:

1. Select the right type and size of ladder.
2. Set up the ladder correctly.
3. Inspect the ladder for damage and wear.
4. Use the ladder correctly.



#### **Ladder selection**

The first principle sounds simple: choose the right ladder. There are many types of ladders from which to choose. The first step in ladder safety is to use the correct ladder for the job. To select the proper size ladder, determine the standing level that needs to be reached to safely perform the job. Then select the ladder that has the highest standing level that is equal to or greater than this value. The highest standing level can be found on the ladder's labeling. Using the wrong ladder size or type for the task at hand is one of the most common causes of ladder injuries. Simply taking a moment to consider the situation and the task at hand can prevent a potentially serious incident.

#### **Ladder inspection**

The feet on a ladder are like the tires on a vehicle, the materials wear out with use. If the tread is worn, the ladder feet must be replaced. If the side rails are cracked, bent or split, the ladder must be replaced. Fiberglass breaks down in UV radiation from sunlight and will fade faster when stored outside. If the fiberglass starts to bloom or if the rungs or steps are bent or broken, the ladder must be replaced. Also, make sure the feet are free from any dirt, grease or oil before standing on the ladder. Over time, latches, locks, rivets, bolts and ropes become loose and worn. Make sure these connections are tight and the ladder does not walk. A worker can do everything else right, select the right ladder, set it up and use it correctly, but if the ladder fails it can result in a potentially catastrophic incident. When a ladder is worn out, destroy it and throw it away. Use this as an opportunity to replace an old ladder with one of the many safety innovations the ladder industry has developed in the past decade.

#### **Ladder use: Putting it all together**

OSHA says all ladder incidents are preventable. A user can select a brand new ladder that is right for the job and is set up correctly, but incorrect use will result in an accident. Some of the most common misuses are standing on the top step or top cap of a stepladder, overreaching, missing the bottom rung when descending and twisting or facing the wrong direction on the ladder. These mistakes contribute to thousands of injuries and hundreds of fatalities each year. Keep the belt buckle between the side rails and face the ladder when working. Instead of reaching just a little farther, climb down and move the ladder. Employees who perform job functions while standing on a low-height stepstool or a 16-step mobile ladder stand must realize that their safe return home to their families is predicated on their keen awareness and understanding of how to use ladders.

Companies must ensure that they are providing the right equipment for the work being performed. Ladder manufacturers must continue to innovate and design against the dangers or pain points associated with human behavior when working from a ladder.