

TOOLBOX TALK #33

LADDER SAFETY

One of the biggest trends in the ladder industry has been the introduction of the leaning stepladder. These stepladders are specifically designed to be used in the closed position and leaned against the wall – something people have been doing forever with their old stepladders. Those stepladders, however, weren't designed to be used in that position, which posed a safety concern. For years, we have taught that leaning a stepladder against a wall was against the rules. Some companies have even written it into their safety policy. So, how do I know if my leaning ladder is safe to use?

The rule from OSHA: “Ladders shall be used only for the purpose for which they were designed.” Stepladders were originally designed to be used only in the open A-frame position. Recently, companies have redesigned their stepladders to be used safely in the closed leaning position, meaning they comply with the OSHA standard. These companies made safe leaning ladders possible by changing three design elements of the ladder:

- **Top cap.** A pad has been added to the back of the top cap. Some companies have modified the top caps to also fit on corners, poles or the stud of a framed wall.
- **Back legs.** They need to be locked in the closed position, preventing the back feet from making contact with the ground and causing the ladder to tip or shift.
- **Feet.** The feet have been redesigned with either a curve to maximize the surface contact or a swivel foot similar to that of an extension ladder.

Ladder manufacturers designed these ladders after listening to employees and what they needed to work safely and effectively. The leaning ladder allows the user to get to all those hard-to-reach places he or she can't reach with the ladder open. These new leaning A-frames will be easily identified with a sticker that shows the usable positions.

Although these ladders are a great option, workers need to remember that old A-frame stepladders weren't designed to be leaned. When workers see new ladders being leaned, they will be tempted to use all the A-frame ladders that way. Only ladders with the new design changes should be used in the leaning position. Also, if a company's policy states that no ladder should be leaning, this is still the rule of the company. OSHA may fine you, even if you're using one of the new ladders, if that's the way it's written in your safety policies. To avoid the argument, update the policy to reflect the change in ladder design.