

TOOLBOX TALK #36

PORTABLE LADDERS – INSPECTION AND USE

Ladder Inspection. Ladders should be inspected prior to each use. But 66% of workers who had sustained an injury involving a ladder were never taught how to inspect a ladder for defects. No ladder lasts forever. Even properly stored and maintained ladders will warp, bow or become brittle over time and need to be replaced. Inspecting a ladder before each use will help to identify defects and ensure that the ladder is in good working condition.

Employees need to be taught what to look for when inspection a ladder. Ladders with bent or dented side rails or rungs, and those with missing steps or rungs must be tagged and discarded. Most contractors implement the best practice of physically destroying damaged ladders to prevent anyone from using it.

Stepladders must not be used if spreader bars are missing, damaged or do not lock. Likewise, all hinges on articulating ladders must have well lubricating hinges that lock properly. Wooden ladders that are painted can hide structural defects.

Even though ladders should be inspected before each use and removed from service if they are damaged, it is still a good idea to do periodic audits of all ladders in inventory to make sure that each is still serviceable.

Ladder Use. It is easy to find pictures and stories of people using ladders unsafely. Some use ladders unsafely or make the wrong ladder choice because they are in a hurry. Others have never been taught to use a ladder properly. A recent study found that 73% of workers interviewed after an accident had not received training.

Teach workers the importance of placing ladders on firm, stable, level ground and securing the base of the ladder before climbing. When employees are climbing and descending ladders, they need to wear the proper footwear and keep their weight centered between the side rails. To maintain three points of contact when climbing and descending, tools, equipment and materials should not be hand carried.

Performing a thorough hazard assessment, training workers to use the right tool for the job and conducting periodic inspections all help to minimize the chance of fall-related incidents. Whether employees use ladders daily or only once or twice a year, knowing how to choose the right ladder for the job and how to use it safely will prevent injuries and deaths.