

TEAM TALKS

Ladder Safety

When we think about ladder safety, we often focus on high elevation tasks like cleaning gutters, fixing roofs or other jobs that require an extendable ladder or even an elevated platform. The fact is though, we need to be paying attention to safety when we're working from any height off the floor. The majority of ladder-related injuries are not exactly what you'd expect.

Here's a story:

While working and decorating in the lobby of a youth-serving organization, an older office employee was on a small stepladder. She fell from the ladder, hitting her head, hip and leg, and cut her head on a broken decoration on the floor. After further investigation, it became apparent that she had been feeling dizzy on and off for a number of months and that this was the cause of her fall.

The moral here is two-fold. One, don't use a ladder or perform any tasks that would require a ladder if you have any history of feeling dizzy. And two, even a small fall can cause serious harm.

A ladder is a tool. The basic safety rules that apply to tools also apply to the safe use of ladders. As always, put safety first with any maintenance project or task using a ladder.

Let's imagine for a moment what could happen in the following scenarios:

- You are using an aluminum ladder and working with electricity
- You leave a ladder unsupervised, giving a child access to the roof
- You are using a ladder in front of doors that open towards you
- You skip the last two rungs and jump off the ladder
- You stand on a chair to reach something, instead of using a ladder

Each of these scenarios could end in serious injury.

We want you to be safe when working on a ladder, and we want everyone near that ladder to be safe, too.

NOTES

Team Talks are intended to provide ready-to-use content for facilitated safety discussions on key topics. Whether you use this copy as an exact script, or as a set of talking points for creating your own talk, is up to you. We hope it provides a useful starting point for discussion. As always, we would love to hear feedback on how your talk goes, and what more we can do to support you in creating a true culture of safety.

The Redwoods Group

When using a ladder, here are some of the things **to do** :

- **Do assess the overall condition of the ladder** – inspect it for missing or damaged parts, and painted or taped components before use
- **Do wear appropriate footwear** – wear closed-toed shoes, preferably with a slip-resistant sole
- **Do read the ladder's safety labels** – follow manufacturer guidelines and the written weight restrictions
- **Do ask for help** – especially when moving awkward or heavy ladders more than 8 feet tall or 50 pounds
- **Do stabilize the ladder** – make sure it's on a firm, level surface and the leg-spreaders are fully engaged and locked
- **Do position the ladder** – if you're using a straight ladder, make sure it's positioned at roughly a 75 degree angle (that means the base is 1 foot away from the wall for every 4 feet of height)
- **Do face the ladder** – when using it to ascend and descend
- **Do keep at least one hand and one foot on the ladder's rungs at all times** – keep in mind this will affect what, how and how much you can carry
- **Do keep your body and any material you carry close** – stay upright and centered over the ladder without reaching or leaning, move the ladder if needed

And here are a few important **don'ts** :

- **Don't use anything other than a ladder or approved device** – in other words, don't stand on tables or chairs
- **Don't work on a ladder by yourself** – make sure someone else is around in case something goes wrong
- **Don't work on a ladder if you're feeling dizzy or unwell**
- **Don't stand on the very top of the ladder**

If you are using a smaller stepladder, you may think it's no big deal because it is low to the ground, but you still need to be careful to stabilize the ladder and ensure all four feet are on a firm, level surface.

Are you ready to take a true or false quiz on ladder safety?

Never use a ladder in front of doors that open towards you without blocking, locking or guarding the doors.

TRUE – The last thing you need is someone opening the door and knocking you off the ladder.

It's ok to leave a ladder unattended if you leave a DO NOT USE note and say you are coming right back.

FALSE – Never ever leave a ladder unattended even for a second.

You do not always need to lock the leg-spreader.

FALSE – For safety, you should always check to be sure the leg spreader is locked.

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