YOUR GUIDE TO USING LADDERS SAFELY

Did you know that over 3500 Australians are injured in falls from ladders each year? Hundreds are admitted to hospital. Sadly, dozens have died.

The majority of accidents happen around the home and to males over 50 years old. Major factors include incorrect ladder placement, unsafe handling, and inappropriate conduct such as over-reaching and carrying excessive loads.

Here are some simple precautions that may help you avoid a serious injury, a trip to the hospital – or worse.

Step 1. Getting ready

• Read the safety warnings on ladders and follow the manufacturer’s advice.
• Always inspect your ladder.
• Wear enclosed, non-slip footwear.
• Check the non-slip feet on your ladder.
• Check the rungs to make sure they are dry and not slippery.

Step 2. Setting up

• Don’t set your ladder up near a doorway. If you have to, ensure the door is locked or blocked.
• Be careful of powerlines and overhead electrical wiring.
• Never use the ladder on your own.
• Set your ladder up so that it extends at least a metre beyond the support it’s resting against, eg a roof.
• Place the ladder on dry, firm, level ground. Use a solid board or base if necessary.
• Secure the top of the ladder into position before starting work.
• Set at a slope of approximately four in one, ie for every metre in height the ladder should extend out at the base by about 250mm.

Step 3. General tips

• Use a tool belt when working on a ladder. This will ensure you keep at least one hand free.
• Never overload a ladder.
• Make sure an extension ladder locks into position.
• Step ladders that open out into an A frame should always be opened fully.
• Keep three points of contact with the ladder, ie two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand.
• Avoid using a ladder in the wind or rain.

Step 4. On the ladder

• Never ‘walk’ your ladder when you’re on it.
• When climbing, always face the ladder.
• Keep your body centred on the ladder.
• Work within an arm’s length of the ladder and never reach out too far. Use the ‘belt buckle’ test: if your belt buckle is outside of the sides of the ladder you’re reaching out too far.
• Only climb as far as the second step from the top of a step ladder or the third step from the top of a straight ladder.

Step 5. Climbing down

• Never climb up or down while carrying something. Get someone else to pass it up, or use a tool belt.
• Have someone hold the ladder while you climb.
• Never have more than one person on the ladder.

Step 6. When you’re done

• Don’t leave your ladder unattended.
• Store your ladder somewhere dry so that it doesn’t buckle, warp or collect dust and damp.
• If someone borrows your ladder, make sure they’re aware of the dangers and safety tips.