

TOOLBOX TALK

Ladders and stepladders toolbox talk

About six minutes · Work at Height Regulations 2005, Schedule 6

SITE

DATE

GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

Falls from height killed 31 workers in Great Britain in 2025/26, more than any other kind of accident, on HSE’s provisional figures. Some of those falls were from ladders, and many falls from low ladders and steps end in serious injury: a broken wrist, a fractured skull, a back that never recovers.

Most ladder falls happen on short, ordinary jobs. The ladder slips at the foot, someone leans out to reach the last bit, or a stepladder tips sideways while drilling. The ladder was fine for the job, or nearly fine, and that is why nobody stopped. This talk is about the checks that take a minute and the jobs where a ladder should not be used at all.

HSE, Work-related fatal injuries in Great Britain 2025/26, RIDFATAL table 3 (kind of accident, 2025/26 provisional)

THE POINTS TO MAKE

- ☐ **Is a ladder the right kit?**

A ladder is allowed when the risk is low and the job is short, or when something on site cannot be changed. As a guide, if you would be up there for more than 30 minutes at a time, use a tower, a podium or a platform instead. Heavy materials, two hands needed for the work, or a reach you cannot make from the ladder all mean the same.
- ☐ **Check it before you climb**

Every working day, and after it has been dropped or moved, check the ladder. Stiles straight and undamaged. Feet present, not worn, and clean, so the feet and not the mud touch the ground. Rungs or steps firm, not bent or loose. Locks and the stepladder platform working. Any defect, and the ladder is not used. Tag it and tell the person in charge.
- ☐ **Where it stands**

Firm, level and clean ground. Use a proper levelling device, never bricks, blocks or packing. Never stand a ladder on a pallet, a van, an excavator bucket or a scaffold tower. Keep it where vehicles cannot hit it and doors cannot push it, with cones or barriers if people pass. The top must rest on something strong, not a plastic gutter or glass.
- ☐ **The angle and the tie**

A leaning ladder goes at 1 in 4, one unit out for every four up, about 75 degrees. Then secure it. Tie both stiles to a suitable point. If that is not possible, use a stability device, then wedge it. Footing by a second person is the last resort. An access ladder is tied and goes at least a metre above the landing for a handhold.
- ☐ **Climbing and working**

Face the ladder, grip the rungs and keep three points of contact: two feet and a hand. Carry only light tools, in a belt or a holster. Do not slide down the stiles or move a ladder while on it. Stay off the top three rungs, and keep your belt buckle inside the stiles. If you have to lean to reach, climb down and move it.
- ☐ **Stepladders**

All four feet on the ground, the locks fully engaged, and the steps facing the work, not side on. Do not stand on the top three steps unless there is something to hold. Avoid side loads such as drilling sideways into brick or concrete. If you cannot avoid them, tie the steps or use something else. A stepladder is not for climbing to another level.
- ☐ **Power lines and electrical work**

Do not use a ladder within 6 metres of an overhead power line unless it has been made dead or is protected with insulation. Carry ladders horizontally near lines and look up before raising one. For electrical work, use a ladder that does not conduct, such as fibreglass or timber. Metal ladders and live equipment do not mix.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Ladders and stepladders toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Ask whether a tower, podium or platform would do the job better before reaching for a ladder.
- Check the stiles, feet, rungs and locks before use and after the ladder has been moved or dropped.
- Set leaning ladders at 1 in 4 on firm, level ground and tie both stiles.
- Keep three points of contact and carry tools in a belt or holster.
- Move the ladder rather than lean out. Keep your belt buckle inside the stiles.
- Tag and report a damaged ladder so nobody else uses it.

DO NOT

- Do not use a ladder for jobs over about 30 minutes, heavy materials or work needing both hands.
- Do not stand a ladder on bricks, pallets, a van, a bucket or a tower.
- Do not work off the top three rungs or steps.
- Do not drill side on from a stepladder unless it is tied.
- Do not use or raise a ladder within 6 metres of an overhead line that is live.
- Do not use a stepladder to climb up to another level.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Which jobs on this site are we doing from ladders, and should any of them be on a tower or podium instead?
- ? When did you last check the feet and locks on the ladder you use?
- ? Where can our ladders be tied, and who has the stability devices?
- ? Where are the overhead lines near this job, and how close do our ladders get?
- ? What would you do with a ladder that has a bent stile or a missing foot?

TO CLOSE

A ladder is a simple bit of kit, and that is why it hurts so many people. It goes up for a quick job, it is not tied, someone leans out to finish, and the foot slides. None of that takes long to fix. Check it, stand it right, tie it, keep three points of contact and climb down to move it. And if the job is long, heavy or needs both hands, it is not a ladder job. Ask for the right kit and we will get it.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Ladders and stepladders toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES