Toolbox talk

Working at height: ladders

Right job, right ladder, checked and secured

10 minutes

For: Anyone who uses leaning ladders or stepladders on site, and the people who plan or supervise that work

Why it matters

Use a ladder only where the risk assessment justifies it. Damage, poor placement, insecure footing and overreaching can cause falls. Choose suitable equipment, check it and follow safe climbing and working practices.

Key points

1. Use a ladder only for low-risk, short-duration work where a risk assessment says it is right.
2. Short duration alone does not make a ladder acceptable. Think about the risk first.
3. As a guide, if a task needs over 30 minutes at a time up a ladder, use something else.
4. Check the ladder before use at the start of the day and after anything changes.
5. Set a leaning ladder at 1 out for every 4 up. That is about 75 degrees.
6. Keep three points of contact when climbing and, wherever possible, at the work position.
7. Keep your belt buckle inside the stiles. Do not overreach.
8. Tie the ladder if you can. Footing it is the last resort.

Sources: HSE: How and when to use a ladder at work; HSE: How to check your ladder is safe before you use it; HSE: Types of ladder and using them safely; HSE: Securing ladders and ladders used for access.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/ladders**

Working at height: ladders

Do

- Check stiles, feet, rungs, locking bars and the stepladder platform before you climb.
- Stand the ladder on firm, level, clean ground.
- Tie both stiles, or use a stability device or wedge, before anyone foots it.
- Make access ladders extend at least 1 m above the landing point.
- Check all four stepladder feet touch the ground and the steps are level.

Don't

- Don't use a ladder with bent stiles, worn feet or damaged rungs.
- Don't stand on the top three rungs of a leaning ladder.
- Don't stand and work on the top three steps of a stepladder unless there's a suitable handhold.
- Don't put a ladder where a door or window could knock it over.
- Don't use a ladder unless you are competent or supervised while training.

Ask the group

- Which jobs on this site are we doing from ladders that should be done from a tower or platform?
- What would make you refuse to use a ladder after your pre-use check?
- Where on this site could we tie ladders, and what do we do if we can't?
- When have you seen someone overreach instead of moving the ladder? What stopped them getting down?

If it goes wrong: If someone falls, do not move them unless they are in danger. Call 999 for serious injuries, get a first aider and tell your supervisor straight away.

On this site

Nearest first aider _____ Emergency assembly point _____

Site-specific hazards and controls _____

_____

Sources: HSE: How and when to use a ladder at work; HSE: How to check your ladder is safe before you use it; HSE: Types of ladder and using them safely; HSE: Securing ladders and ladders used for access.

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Attendance register

Working at height: ladders

Site / project _____ Date and time _____

Presented by _____ Company _____

	Name (print)	Company	Signature
1			
2			
3			
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By signing, attendees confirm they took part in this toolbox talk and understood the key points. Keep this record with your site safety file.

Presenter signature _____ Follow-up actions _____

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Go further: Work out ladder base distance with the 1 in 4 calculator

Sources: HSE: How and when to use a ladder at work; HSE: How to check your ladder is safe before you use it; HSE: Types of ladder and using them safely; HSE: Securing ladders and ladders used for access.
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Quick check

Working at height: ladders

Tick one answer for each question. Your presenter has the answers.

Name _____ Date _____

1. What angle should a leaning ladder be set at?

- [ ] 1 out for every 2 up
- [ ] 1 out for every 4 up
- [ ] 1 out for every 6 up

2. When should a ladder get a pre-use check?

- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] Only when it looks damaged
- [ ] At the start of the day and after something changes

3. What is the best way to secure a leaning ladder?

- [ ] Tie both stiles to a suitable point
- [ ] Get a mate to foot it
- [ ] Lean it on a window

4. How do you know you are overreaching?

- [ ] Your arm is fully stretched
- [ ] Your belt buckle goes outside the stiles
- [ ] You can't see the top of the ladder

5. A ladder used to reach another level should extend how far above the landing?

- [ ] At least 1 m
- [ ] At least 30 cm
- [ ] It doesn't matter if it's tied

For the presenter

Answers and sources

Quick check answers

1. 1 out for every 4 up

HSE says 1 unit out for every 4 units up, which is about 75 degrees.

2. At the start of the day and after something changes

HSE says the user should check it at the start of the working day and after something has changed.

3. Tie both stiles to a suitable point

Tying both stiles comes first. Footing is the last resort.

4. Your belt buckle goes outside the stiles

HSE says keep your belt buckle (or navel) within the stiles.

5. At least 1 m

HSE says access ladders should be tied and extend at least 1 m above the landing point.

Sources

- HSE: How and when to use a ladder at work
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/when-how-to-use-ladders-safely.htm
- HSE: How to check your ladder is safe before you use it
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/how-to-check-ladder-is-safe-before-use.htm
- HSE: Types of ladder and using them safely
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/types-of-ladder.htm
- HSE: Securing ladders and ladders used for access
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/securing-ladders-used-for-access.htm

> **Presenting tips:** keep it to about 10 minutes, use real examples from your site, ask the group questions rather than reading everything out, and record attendance on the register.

Check it. Angle it. Tie it.

1. **Check the ladder before every use**
2. **One out for every four up**
3. **Belt buckle stays inside the stiles**

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Sources and qualifications

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Scope: Great Britain safety legislation unless a nation is identified. Northern Ireland has separate legislation. Site rules can be stricter than minimum legal duties; use the site assessment, instructions and competent supervision.

A4 applicability: no installation-design requirement is asserted in this talk. Its claims are referenced to the subject-specific sources below.

S1. HSE: Ladder selection

Risk assessment, low risk, short duration and 30-minute guide; key points 1-3 and quiz 1.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/when-how-to-use-ladders-safely.htm

S2. HSE: Ladder pre-use checks

Damage, stiles, feet, rungs, platform and locking checks; key point 4 and Do/Don't.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/how-to-check-ladder-is-safe-before-use.htm

S3. HSE: Types of ladder and safe use

1:4 angle, three points of contact, overreaching and top-rung precautions; key points 5-7 and quiz.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/types-of-ladder.htm

S4. HSE: Securing ladders

Tying, securing and footing as last resort; access ladders and handhold; key point 8 and quiz.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/securing-ladders-used-for-access.htm