

SafeWork SA

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Ladders



Ladders are widely used by businesses of all sizes and often in tight workspaces, despite being one of the highest-risk tools for working at heights.

This information sheet outlines how businesses and workers can use ladders safely and minimise the risk of falls.

Is using a ladder the best option?

It is important to remember that ladders are one of the least stable forms of equipment to use when working at heights. Ladders should only be used when no safer option is reasonably practicable, and only for tasks that are short in duration and low in physical demand. Before using one, conduct a risk assessment and determine whether safer alternatives—such as scaffolds or elevated work platforms—can be used.

Selecting a Ladder

If you have determined that you must use a ladder, ensure that you are using the most effective kind of ladder for the task. The ladder should be fit for purpose, appropriate for the task's duration, and set up correctly.

Consider:

- the actions involved in the task (including reach)
- the duration of the task
- ladder stability and height
- physical surroundings and weather conditions.

There are a few different types of ladders you can choose from:

- **order picker ladders** – Most stable, with full fall protection
- **platform ladders** – Portable, moderate stability
- **a-frame, straight, single, step, or extension ladders** – Least stable; use only for short tasks, always maintaining three points of contact.

Positioning a Ladder for access/egress

To position a ladder safely:

- use a 1:4 angle (1m out for every 4m up)
- place on a stable, level surface
- extend the ladder at least 1 metre above the landing
- secure both top and bottom of the ladder
- lock or block any doors if nearby
- use barricades or warning signs if near pedestrian or vehicle traffic.

Do not position ladders:

- in access ways or doorways without barriers
- on scaffolds or platforms for extra height
- near power lines unless trained and using appropriate equipment
- in very wet or windy conditions
- next to high-traffic areas, unless the work is barricaded.

To prevent slipping and toppling of ladders:

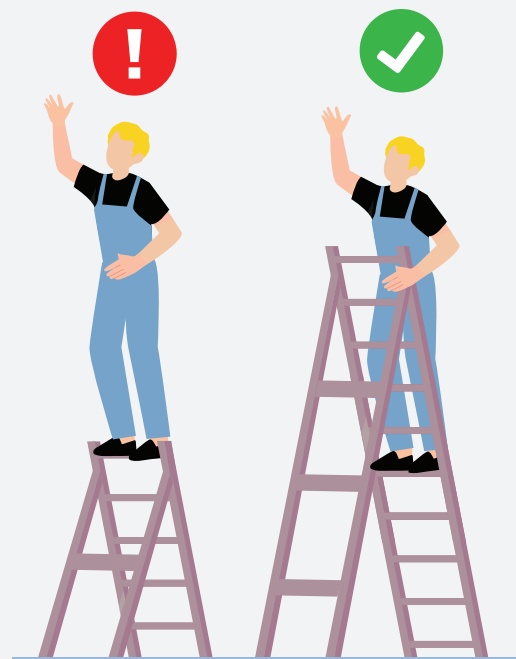
- ensure that the ladder has non-slip feet
- set up step ladders in the fully open position
- have a second person 'foot' the ladder for added stability.



Using an A Frame Ladder Safely

When using a ladder:

- only one person should be on a ladder at any given time
- always maintain three points of contact with the ladder
- always face the ladder when climbing or descending
- don't carry any materials when climbing or descending
- keep your body centred between the sides of the ladder
- don't lean sideways or over-reach
- don't straddle the ladder
- don't stand above the tread or rung on the ladder indicated as the maximum safe working height
- only conduct light work from a ladder
- don't use tools that require two hands or a high degree of leverage
- consider whether a platform ladder is a safer option.



Training

Due to the increased risk of falls, employers must ensure workers receive training on the safe use of ladders before use.

Training should cover:

- correct ladder setup
- safe usage techniques
- proper maintenance and care.

After training, employers must provide ongoing supervision to ensure safe work practices are followed.

Ladders must be regularly inspected by a competent person, following the manufacturer's guidelines. If a ladder appears damaged or unsafe, it must not be used.

For more information,
head to our website or call us:

☎ 1300 365 255

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