SKILLSIGNAL™
Construction Safety & Compliance

# TOOLBOX TALK

*Falls from Portable Ladders: Eight Ways to Come Off a Ladder (and the Rule Against Each One)*

| TOPIC NO. | DURATION | AUDIENCE |
|---|---|---|
| **FP-05** | **10 to 15 min** | **All Crew** |

**OSHA REFERENCE** 29 CFR 1926.1053 · 29 CFR 1910.23 · ANSI ASC A14

| PROJECT / JOBSITE | DATE | PRESENTED BY |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

## 01 THE HOOK

**START HERE**

*Ladders (29 CFR 1926.1053) were the third most cited OSHA standard in the country last year, with 2,842 violations. Not because the rules are complicated. Because the ladder is two feet short and the truck is right there. Because the top step is right there. Because the box is right there. Every fall from a portable ladder starts with somebody deciding the rule did not apply to this one quick job. This talk is eight of those decisions, and what OSHA actually says about each one.*

## 02 THE NUMBERS ON LADDERS

MINIMUM EXTENSION ABOVE THE LANDING

**3**

**FEET**

29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(1)

### THE SIDE RAILS MUST REACH PAST THE TOP

When you use a ladder to get onto a roof or platform, the side rails must extend **at least 3 feet above the upper landing surface**. If that is not possible, the ladder must be **secured at the top** to a rigid support and you need a grab rail or grasping device. The 3 feet is what you hold onto when you step off. Without it, you are stepping off a ladder with nothing in your hands.

SETUP ANGLE

**4:1**

**RISE TO RUN**

29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(5)(i)

### ONE FOOT OUT FOR EVERY FOUR FEET UP

A non-self-supporting ladder must be set so the horizontal distance from the top support to the foot is **about one-quarter of the working length**. Too steep and it tips backward with you on it. Too flat and the feet kick out. Quick check: stand with your toes at the feet, arms straight out. Your palms should land on the rung at shoulder height.

## 03 EIGHT WAYS PEOPLE COME OFF LADDERS

HAZARD

**1**

### THE LADDER IS TOO SHORT, SO YOU MAKE IT TALLER

A ladder on a box, a barrel, a pallet, or a pickup bed is not taller. It is a ladder on an unstable base. **29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(6)**: ladders are used **only on stable and level surfaces** unless secured. And **(a)(7)**: ladders are **not tied or fastened together** to make a longer one unless designed for it. Go get the right ladder.

HAZARD

**2**

### YOU STAND ON THE TOP OF A STEP LADDER

**29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(13)**: **the top or top step of a stepladder shall not be used as a step.** Same rule in general industry at 1910.23(c)(8), which adds the cap. The top cap is a tool shelf. From up there you have no rail to hold and nothing between you and the floor.

HAZARD 3

### ONE FOOT ON THE LADDER, ONE ON SOMETHING ELSE

Straddling between a ladder rung and a beam, a scaffold, or a window sill loads the ladder sideways. Side load is what slides a ladder out. **Both feet on the same rung.** If you need to be on the other surface, get on it and move the ladder.

HAZARD 4

### YOU CLIMB WITH STUFF IN YOUR HANDS

**29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(21)**: use **at least one hand to grasp the ladder** when going up or down. **(b)(22)**: do not carry **any object or load that could cause you to lose balance**. Tool belt, hoist line, or a bucket on a rope. Not your hands.

HAZARD 5

### YOU LEAN OUT INSTEAD OF MOVING THE LADDER

Reaching sideways shifts your weight outside the rails and tips the ladder or pulls your feet off the rung. **Keep your belt buckle between the side rails.** Better: keep your breastbone between them. When the work moves, climb down and move the ladder.

HAZARD 6

### YOU LEAN A STEP LADDER AGAINST THE WALL

A step ladder's feet are built to sit flat with the spreaders locked open. Leaned against a wall, the feet are at the wrong angle and the bottom kicks out. **29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(4)**: **ladders are used only for the purpose for which they were designed.** (Some specialty ladders are built to lean. Only those.)

HAZARD 7

### YOU CLIMB THE BACK SIDE OF A STEP LADDER

**29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(14)**: **cross-bracing on the rear section of stepladders shall not be used for climbing** unless the ladder is designed with steps on both sides. The braces are too far apart, not rated for your weight, and not treated for grip.

HAZARD 8

### YOU SET UP IN A TRUCK BED OR A BUCKET

A ladder in a pickup bed, on a trailer deck, or in a loader bucket is standing on something that can move. It has no 4:1 angle, nothing to secure to, and a drop-off on every side. **Never.** Not even with the keys in your pocket.

## 04 THE LADDER ITSELF

Before the first climb, look at the ladder. **29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(16)**: a portable ladder with **structural defects** (broken or missing rungs, split rails, corroded parts, bad feet) must be **tagged "Do Not Use" and withdrawn from service** until repaired. Repairs must restore it to the original design (**(b)(18)**). That means:

- ☐ Rungs and steps all present, tight, and clean of mud, grease, or ice.
- ☐ Side rails straight, no cracks, splits, dents, or bends.
- ☐ Feet present, with the slip-resistant pads intact.
- ☐ Spreaders on step ladders lock fully open; extension locks and rope in working order.
- ☐ Duty rating label legible and rated for you plus your tools (Type IA: 300 lb; Type IAA: 375 lb).
- ☐ No field repairs, no tape, no wire, no salvaged "good half" of a broken ladder.

⚠ **DON'T SALVAGE HALF A BROKEN LADDER**

A cracked extension ladder does not have a good section and a bad section. It has a failed section and an untested one. Tag the whole thing, pull it from the site, and do not let anyone "just use the top half." Field repairs on ladders are prohibited, and so is using a ladder in a way its manufacturer never designed.

## 05 WHY IT MATTERS

### [ JOBSITE ]

**FOR THE CREW**

Ladder citations are the easiest ones for an inspector to write from the sidewalk: a ladder on a bucket, a guy on the top cap, nothing tied off. Every one of those is a crew member one slip from a stretcher.

### [ INDIVIDUAL ]

**FOR YOU**

Most fatal falls happen from 20 feet or less. A step ladder is 6 to 12 feet. You are not safe because the ladder is short. You are safe because both feet are on the same rung, one hand is on the rail, and the ladder is on solid ground.

### [ HOME ]

**FOR LIFE OFF-SITE**

Gutters, holiday lights, the attic hatch. Home ladder falls fill emergency rooms every fall and every December. Same eight mistakes. Same rules.

## 06 TODAY'S DRILL

**TODAY'S DRILL** **SET ONE UP RIGHT**

Pick a ladder on this site and check it against the list above. Then set it up the right way: stable footing, 4:1 angle, 3 feet above the landing or tied off, and nothing in your hands when you climb it. If any ladder on this site fails the inspection, tag it "Do Not Use" and tell the foreman before the end of the day.

## 07 CREW DISCUSSION

*Take 2 minutes. Pick one.*

1. Which of the eight do you see most on this site? What makes it feel acceptable in the moment?
2. When was the last time you were on a ladder that was two feet too short? What did you do about it?
3. Who has actually tagged a ladder out of service here? What happened to it after?

## 08 ATTENDANCE & SIGN-OFF

All attendees confirm they participated in this Toolbox Talk and understand the content covered.

| NAME (PRINT) | SIGNATURE |
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**SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE**

_____ Date: _____

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