



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Reed College

3203 Southeast woodstock boulevard
Portland, Oregon 97202-8199

PORTABLE LADDER SAFETY

Portable ladders are one of the handiest, simplest tools we use because of their effectiveness and use by so many different people to perform so many different tasks. Although ladders are very uncomplicated, planning and care are still required to use them safely. Each year in the U.S., accidents involving ladders cause an estimated 300 deaths and 130,000 injuries requiring emergency medical attention.

LADDER HAZARDS

Some of the more common hazards involving ladders are instability, electrical shock, and falls and can actually be predicted and prevented. Prevention requires proper planning, correct ladder selection, good work procedures, and adequate ladder maintenance.

Prevention tips:

- Do not hand-carry loads on a ladder.
- Do not try reaching so far that you lose your balance; move the ladder.
- Non-skid feet may prevent a ladder from slipping on a hard, smooth surface.
- Do not stand on the ladder's top three rungs.
- A damaged side rail may cause one side of a ladder to give way.
- The base should be spaced 1 foot away for every 4 feet it reaches up.
- Extension ladders need both locks holding to prevent overloading a rail.
- Securely spread open stepladders. Never use a folding stepladder in an unfolded position.
- Electrical shock can occur with metal or wet wooden ladders.

LADDER SELECTION

Portable ladders are designed as "one-man" equipment, with the proper strength to support the worker as well as his tools and materials. The three general classes of Ladders are:

- Type I **Industrial** - Heavy-duty with a load capacity not more than 250 pounds.
- Type II **Commercial** - Medium-duty with a load capacity not more than 225 pounds (suited for painting and similar tasks).
- Type III **Household** - Light-duty with a load capacity of 200 pounds.

LADDER MAINTENANCE

Wood ladders should be protected with a clear sealer varnish, shellac, linseed oil or wood preservative. Wood ladders should not be painted, because the paint could hide defects. Check carefully for cracks, rot, splinters, broken rungs, loose joints and bolts and hardware in poor condition.

Aluminum or steel ladders should be inspected closely before use. Replace worn or frayed ropes on extension ladders at once. Aluminum ladders are very corrosion-resistant, but exposing them to fertilizer can cause damage.

Fiberglass ladders should have a surface coat of lacquer that has been maintained.