

Get a leg up on safety.

Five Rules of Ladder Safety

It turns out you don't actually have to walk under a ladder for it to be bad luck. Using ladders improperly can be dangerous, even deadly. In fact, 6,000 people die each year in this country from accidents involving ladders.

There are five steps that you should take before stepping on a ladder – starting with picking the right ladder, with the right rating and the right height. How you set it up and how you use it are also critical to your safety.

A ladder is a valuable tool for getting the job done. Get it done. Use the right ladder. Safely.

1 SELECT THE RIGHT LADDER FOR THE JOB

There are many types of ladders available, each intended for a specific purpose. In addition, they may be of wood, aluminum or fiberglass construction and designed for light to industrial use. For typical applications two types are most common: straight ladders (single or extension) and step ladders.

Regardless of the type or construction, be sure the ladder has a label certifying that it complies with specifications of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and that it is listed by Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

Be sure the ladder is long enough to work from comfortably and sturdy enough to withstand repeated use. Aluminum is a good choice of construction since it is lightweight and is not affected by weather as much as wood. However, wood or fiberglass ladders are not as “shaky” as aluminum ladders.

If the work involves possible contact with sources of electrical current, an aluminum ladder is not suitable since it conducts electricity. In these places a dry wood or fiberglass ladder is needed.



2 INSPECT THE LADDER BEFORE YOU USE IT

Any ladder can develop a problem which can render it unsafe. Each time you use a ladder, inspect it for loose or damaged rungs, steps, rails or braces. Also check for loose screws, bolts hinges and other hardware. Make certain the spreaders on stepladders can be locked in place and that the ladder has safety feet which will provide more stability and reduce the chances of the ladder slipping while you work.

If the ladder has any type of defect, it must be repaired or the ladder must be replaced. Never use a ladder which is defective. A painted wood ladder may have defects which are hidden by the paint. Painting a wood ladder is not recommended. However, it can be treated with clear materials such as varnish and wood preservatives.

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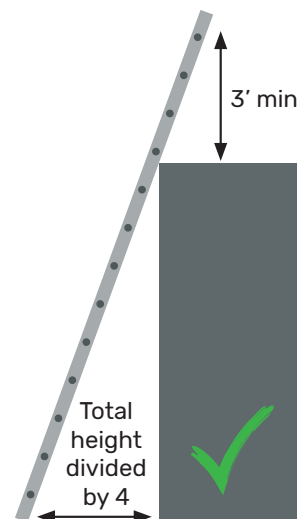
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3 SET UP THE LADDER WITH CARE

No matter how safe a ladder is, if it's placed in a dangerous location or set up improperly an accident is bound to happen. If you must set a ladder in a traffic area, use a barricade or guard to prevent collisions. Lock or block any nearby door that opens toward you. The area around the base should be kept uncluttered, and the ladder should be set on a solid, level surface.

Stepladders should be fully opened with the spreaders locked. Straight ladders should be placed at a four-to-one ratio. This means the base of the ladder should be one foot away from the wall or other vertical surface for every four feet of height to the point of support.

If you climb onto a roof or platform from a ladder, be sure the ladder extends above the edge at least three feet. If possible, secure a straight ladder as close to the point of support as possible to prevent shifting. Never lean a ladder against an unstable surface.



4 CLIMB AND DESCEND LADDERS CAUTIOUSLY

Always face the ladder and hold on with both hands. If you need tools, carry them in a tool belt or raise and lower them with a hand line.

To avoid slipping, always check the rungs and the bottoms of your shoes for slippery substances. You may wish to apply a slip-resistant material to the steps of a metal ladder to provide better footing.

5 USE COMMON SENSE WHEN WORKING ON A LADDER

Always hold on with one hand and never reach too far to either side or to the rear. To maintain your balance, keep your belt buckle between the ladder rails. Climbing too high can also lead to accidents, so never climb higher than the second step from the top on a stepladder or the third from the top on a straight ladder.

Need more information? Contact Montana State Fund's safety team at **800-332-6102** or visit **safemt.com**.

