



SAFETY ALERT

SAFE USE OF PORTABLE LADDERS

May 2010

This safety alert is published following two recent incidents where painters fell from ladders and suffered serious injuries, one being a fatality. In both cases the painters used portable ladders and were working at a height of approximately five metres.

WorkCover reminds employers and those in control of the work site that the use of ladders should only be considered if other safer alternatives, such as scaffolding or elevating work platforms, are not reasonably practicable.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* requires employers and those in control of workplaces to take all necessary steps to ensure that safe systems of work are implemented, maintained and supervised, and that persons undertaking them are provided with adequate information and training to ensure their safety.

The *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* clause 56 provides more specific obligations on preventing falls from heights.

The codes of practice *Safe work on roofs: Part 1 – commercial and industrial* and *Safe work on roofs: Part 2 – residential buildings* provide employers, self-employed people and workers with practical advice on preventing injury to people engaged in work on roofs, including the use of ladders.

RISK CONTROLS

There are limits to the safe use of a ladder and they should only be used to carry out light duty work of short duration. Domestic ladders must not be used in an industrial environment. Industrial ladders have a load rating of 120 kg or more, whereas domestic ladders have a load rating of 100 kg.

The controls identified in this safety alert are not exhaustive, and a number of measures could be integrated into the system of work to ensure the risks are effectively controlled.

The following are some of the control measures that should be considered:

- Ensure safer access systems – eg scaffolding and elevating work platforms – are used as a first resort. Only use ladders if these other systems are not reasonably practicable.
- Ensure the ladder is suitable for the task, in good working condition and fitted with rubber (or similar non-slip material) feet.
- Ensure the supporting surface is adequate, that it is level and the ladder will not sink into or slide on it.

- Ensure the ladder, when leaned against the wall or edge, has a ratio of height to horizontal distance from wall of 4:1 and is secured (devices are available to secure the ladder at the top and bottom).
- Ensure you always have three points of contact while ascending, descending or working from the ladder.

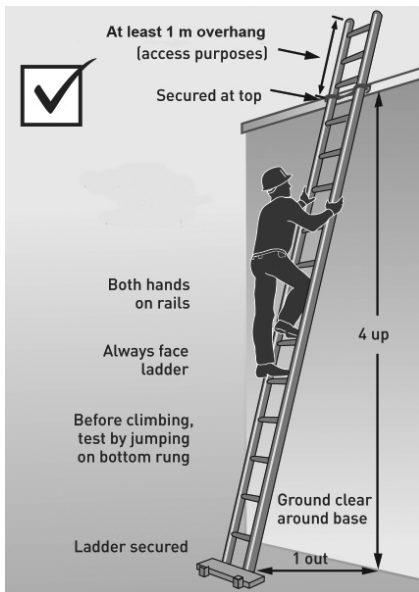


Image provided by Safe Work Australia.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- workcover.nsw.gov.au
 - Code of practice *Safe work on roofs: Part 1 – commercial and industrial*
 - Code of practice *Safe work on roofs: Part 2 – residential buildings*
 - Guide: *Safe working at heights*
- safeworkaustralia.gov.au
 - *National code of practice for the prevention of falls in general construction*
 - *National code of practice for the prevention of falls in housing construction*
- sai-global.com/shop
 - AS/NZS 1892.1 – 1996 *Portable ladders Part 1: Metal*
 - AS 1892.2 – 1992 *Portable ladders Part 2: Timber*
 - AS/NZS 1892.3 – 1996 *Portable ladders Part 3: Reinforced plastic*
 - AS/NZS 1892.5 – 2000 *Portable ladders Part 5: Selection, safe use and care*

For specific advice, go to workcover.nsw.gov.au or call **13 10 50**.

Disclaimer

This publication may contain occupational health and safety and workers compensation information. It may include some of your obligations under the various legislations that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website (www.legislation.nsw.gov.au).

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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