



Stepladder Safety



- ▶ This bulletin covering stepladder safety deals with specific issues related to safe stepladder use.

▶ INTRODUCTION

Stepladder safety has become a major concern over recent years as employees have received serious injuries in falls, some of which have resulted in prolonged health problems and, in the worst case, a fatality.

▶ IS A LADDER THE RIGHT TOOL?

Ladders are not designed as working platforms so make sure a ladder is the appropriate tool for the purpose. There are a lot of different light platforms available to work off. If you choose a ladder then it is important to choose one that is built to the right standard and use it correctly.

▶ STEPLADDER STANDARDS

Stepladders are used more widely than pole or extension ladders. They are manufactured for use by the home handyman and also trades-people. Stepladders for trades-people must be more robust as they usually have to carry more weight and suffer greater wear and tear and therefore should comply with **AS/NZS 1892.1. 1996**. When purchasing a stepladder for use in the construction industry choose the ladder that is designed for that workplace. Stepladders for the construction industry should be labeled as being manufactured to the specifications set out in the Standard.

Stepladders that are manufactured for the home handyman are often cheaper but usually only suitable for use around the home. Because they are used less frequently these ladders are not as likely to sustain damage, as they would be if used in the construction industry.

Normally one would also be able to ascertain if an aluminium stepladder is suitable for construction work by the extra thickness of the aluminium, plus more rivets and bracing used in its manufacture.

▶ MAINTENANCE OF STEPLADDERS

Aluminium stepladders should be kept free of any waste products, e.g. cement, paints, adhesives or sealants. A build-up of these products could cover up imperfections

such as cracks and missing rivets. Rubber boots should be fitted to the base of the styles on all aluminium ladders. After a period of time these boots may become very brittle and lose the ability to grip the surface. If, during a visual inspection it is found that the boots are not satisfactory, they should be replaced immediately.

▶ MULTI-PURPOSE STEPLADDERS

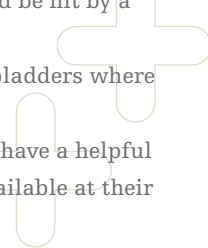
Many stepladders in use throughout the country are dual purpose; that is, they can also be folded out and used as a pole ladder.

Numerous accidents have occurred with the use of these types of ladder. Some of the early models have a very inadequate locking device at the top when folded out. If the ladder is placed on the wrong angle or the climber has overreached, the ladder is likely to fold or collapse.

▶ ESSENTIAL SAFE WORK PRACTICES TO CONSIDER WHEN USING A STEPLADDER

- **Never** attempt to work from the top two treads of a stepladder.
- **Always** face the stepladder treads when using a stepladder.
- **Never** attempt to use a stepladder with a single stay, or a temporary stay. (All stepladders must have rigid stays in place when in use.)
- **Never** use a stepladder for access or egress into another workspace.
- **Never** lean to one side or overreach while using a stepladder.
- **Never** use a stepladder as a support for a working platform as they are too unstable.
- **Always** visually inspect a ladder before each use.
- **Always** place a stepladder on a flat surface and firm ground.
- **Do not** place a stepladder on boxes or scaffolds to gain extra height.
- **Always** take care when positioning a stepladder in corridors or driveways where it could be hit by a person or vehicle.
- **Set up** suitable barriers around stepladders where necessary.

The Accident Compensation Corporation have a helpful pamphlet on how to use a ladder. It is available at their website. Search for *ladder safety*.





▶ AN ACCIDENT CASE STUDY

A person using a stepladder to gain access/egress to a 2 metre-high working platform was injured when the ladder collapsed. The accident occurred when he was descending from the platform onto the top of the ladder. Head and arm injuries resulted from the fall onto a concrete floor.

Note: This material has been prepared using the best information available to the Department of Labour at the time of publication. Information may change over time and it may be necessary for you to obtain an update. This material is also only intended to provide general advice and does not constitute legal advice. You should make your own judgement about action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with your workplace health and safety obligations under the law.

