

Portable Ladder Safety — The 6 Rules That Prevent Falls

Every portable ladder used on the job must meet these OSHA construction-standard requirements. Fix one rule and you remove one of the top causes of preventable workplace fatalities.

01 Use the 4:1 angle

Set non-self-supporting (extension/straight) ladders so the horizontal distance from the base to the wall equals one-quarter of the working length. For a 16-ft working length, the base sits 4 ft out. Wrong angle = top slip or base kick-out.

§1926.1053(b)(5)(i)

02 Extend 3 ft above the landing

When used to access an upper landing surface, the side rails must extend at least 3 feet (0.9 m) above the landing. If 3 ft is not possible, the ladder must be secured at the top and a grasping device provided.

§1926.1053(b)(1)

03 Three points of contact — always

Face the ladder when climbing or descending. Keep two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand, in contact with the ladder at all times. Carry tools in a belt or hoist them — never in your hands while climbing.

§1926.1053(b)(21)–(22)

04 Inspect before every use

Visually inspect rails, rungs, locks, feet, and rope/pulley for cracks, breaks, missing parts, corrosion, and oil/grease. Tag and remove defective ladders from service immediately. Document inspections per your competent-person program.

§1926.1053(b)(15)–(16)

05 Secure base and top

Place ladders on stable, level surfaces. Secure the top when used for access, or use a ladder-positioning device. Do not stand ladders on boxes, barrels, or other unstable bases to gain height. Never place a ladder in a doorway unless the door is blocked, locked, or guarded.

§1926.1053(b)(6)–(8)

06 Keep clear of electrical hazards

Portable metal ladders must NOT be used near energized electrical equipment. When work is near energized lines, use non-conductive (fiberglass) side rails. Wood ladders are not a substitute for the de-energize/cover-up procedures required by the electrical standards.

§1926.1053(b)(12)

Need a ladder competent-person training program or fall-from-ladder injury review?

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