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Safe working with ladders and stepladders

This fact sheet is for anyone considering using a ladder or stepladder at work. It provides information to help you work safely while using them.

Is a ladder the right tool for carrying out your job safely?

Ladders are primarily a means of access to carry out light tasks that are of short duration, for example changing a light bulb or touching up paint. They do not offer any protection from a fall.

Consider control measures when selecting the best way to work at height.

- Eliminate the chances of a fall by doing as much preparation work as possible on the ground.
- Minimise the risk of a fall by taking actions to prevent it. For example, isolate the worker from the risk by using scaffolds and edge protection.

A person conducting a business or undertaking must seek the views of their workers and their representatives when working out how to deal with work risks. Workers can provide technical and operational knowledge on identifying, assessing and eliminating/minimising risks.

Checking and setting up your ladder or stepladder

Choose the correct type of ladder for the task. For example, make sure it is the right height or style for the task, and use non-conductive ladders in areas where there are electrical hazards.

Before using ladders or stepladders, check they are in good condition. There should be no loose rivets, no splits in the stiles, and all safety components should work correctly.

Ensure the person setting up the ladder or stepladder has been trained or supervised to work safely. They should be set up away from hazards and account for weather conditions, for example not being near power lines in very wet or windy weather.

Remember these safety steps when using a ladder

- Secure the ladder at the top and bottom to prevent it slipping sideways or outwards – some ladders have stabilising clips.
- If a ladder cannot be secured, have a second person provide footing for added stability.
 - Footing a ladder means having a second person physically hold the base of the ladder while it is in use. This should only be considered, following a risk assessment, if other means of safely securing the ladder cannot be achieved.
- Place straight ladders 1m out at the base for every 4m of height for stability.
- Stop at the third step from the top of a straight ladder. A person standing higher may lose their balance and fall.

- Do not exceed the rated safe working load of the ladder.
- Do not overreach – keep the centre of your torso within the stiles and both feet on the same rung while working.
- Carry tools on a tool belt. Do not rest tools or other items on the steps or hang them from the rungs.
- Ladders should be of industrial rating (minimum 120kg) and meet, or exceed, the requirements of the relevant *AS/NZS 1892 Portable ladders* standard.
- Ladders should be clearly labelled, structurally sound, and not covered in chemicals or other materials.



FIGURE 1:
Safe and unsafe use of a ladder

Keep **three points of contact** on the ladder at all times for safety, in case you slip. For example, holding on with any of your feet or hands, and including bracing your body (like your knees or chest) against the ladder when you briefly need two hands free.

Tips for working safely from stepladders

- Ensure that the stepladder is set up on stable ground, and all the stabilising stays and locking clips or locking arms are engaged securely.
- Ensure the stepladder is at least 4m clear of power lines.
- Have the steps facing the work activity.
- Avoid standing on the top two steps of the stepladder. This makes it unstable and prone to tipping over.
- Avoid side-on loading work (for example, drilling side-on through bricks or concrete).
- Where side-on loading cannot be avoided, prevent the stepladder from tipping over by tying the steps to a secure point. If this cannot be done, use access equipment that is more suitable.
- Avoid holding items when climbing and use a tool belt.



FIGURE 2:
Safe and unsafe use of a stepladder

For more information about how to work safely at height visit: [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)