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## Safe working with ladders and stepladders

This fact sheet is for anyone considering using a ladder or stepladder in a workplace.

The Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment – Labour’s investigations into construction falls from height show:

- more than 50% of falls are from less than 3 m
- approximately 70% of falls are from ladders and roofs.

The cost of falls from height in construction has been estimated at \$24 million a year. The financial and human cost is simply too high.

Preventing falls from height is a priority for the WorkSafe New Zealand and it expects employers and contractors with staff working at height to actively manage this significant hazard.

Everyone – the principal, the self-employed contractor and subcontractor, the employer and the worker – is responsible for preventing falls on a construction site.

### Control the hazard – doing nothing is not an option

To stay safe when working at height, you need to ensure effective controls are in place to prevent people being harmed. To select the most effective controls, you must consider the following steps in sequence:

1. **Eliminate** the chances of a fall by doing as much of the preparation work as possible on the ground.
2. **Isolate** the worker from the risk of a fall by using scaffolds and edge protection to prevent the fall.
3. Only when these steps are not achievable should the risk be **minimised**.

**Remember doing nothing is not an option!**

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

Ladders don’t offer any protection from a fall. 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.

When selecting the best way to work at height, always assess the hazard of a fall by following the hierarchy of controls – elimination, isolation and minimisation.

#### CHECK IF A LADDER IS THE BEST AND SAFEST WAY FOR YOU TO WORK

##### What is the task?

- Is it light work?
- Is the person setting up the ladder trained or supervised to work safely?
- Is the ladder in good condition – rungs, feet, stiles?
- Can the ladder be positioned and secured to prevent movement?

Straight ladders should be 1 m out at the base for every 4 m of height

## Remember these safety steps when using a ladder

- **Secure the ladder** at the top and bottom to prevent it slipping sideways or outwards.
- **Don't overload** the person and anything they are taking up should not exceed the highest safe working load stated on the ladder.
- **Don't overreach** keep line of the belt buckle (navel) inside the stiles and both feet on the same rung while working.
- **Don't rest tools** or other items on the steps or hanging from the rungs.
- **Carry tools** on a tool belt.
- **Stop** at the third step from the top of a straight ladder.
- **Keep three points of contact** on the ladder at all times – two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand while climbing, and two feet and one hand when working.
- **Ladders must be trade or industrial standard** with a rating of either 120 kg or 150 kg and comply with the AS/NZS 1892 standard.
- Ladders should be clearly labelled, structurally sound, and not covered in chemicals or other materials.



**CORRECT** ✓

User maintaining three points of contact



**INCORRECT** ✗

Overreaching and not maintaining three points of contact

## Tips for working safely from stepladders

1. Ensure the ladder is maintained and in good condition – no loose rivets, no splits in the stiles, all safety components working correctly.
2. Ensure that the stepladder is set up on stable ground and all the stabilising stays and locking clips or locking arms are engaged securely.
3. Ensure the ladder is at least 4 m clear of power lines.
4. Have the steps facing the work activity.
5. Avoid side-on loading work (eg drilling side-on through bricks or concrete).
6. 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.
7. Avoid holding items when climbing and use a tool belt.



**CORRECT** ✓

Steps facing work activity



**INCORRECT** ✗

Steps are side-on to work activity

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

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