# Straight Talk About Straight Ladder Safety




## Safety Talk

Two workers were attempting to install a wooden sign board on the storefront of a building. They were both on the ground attempting to position an aluminum ladder. They lost control of it, causing the ladder to fall backwards. It struck an 8,000-volt overhead power line. The two men were electrocuted instantly.

**Fatalities like this one occur all too often. The following are guidelines for the safe use of straight ladders:**

*Is it in good repair?*

- Check the condition of the rungs, side rails and feet, and make sure that they are secure.
- A wooden ladder should not be painted, because this can hide cracks or defects. Instead, use a wood preservative or clear finish for protection.
- Check aluminum ladders for signs of loose rivets, cracks, corrosion or other damage.
- On extension ladders, make sure that ropes, pulleys and locks are in good working order.
- Check for warping and twisting in the shape of the ladder. Do not use a wooden ladder when wet because it might twist or loosen when it dries.
- Make sure the feet of the ladder are clean and will resist slipping.
- If you find a defective ladder, tag it and report it immediately so that it can be destroyed – before someone else has an accident using it.

*Is it the correct ladder for the job?*

- Never use a ladder made of metal such as aluminum or one with metal reinforcement for or around any electrical work.
- Make sure the ladder is strong enough to support you and your tools.
- Never use a ladder for other than its intended purpose. A ladder is not to be used as a scaffold or a gangplank. A ladder is just a short-term route for travelling up and down, and is not meant for extended or heavy work.

*Is the ladder set up safely?*

- Use the four in one rule to position the ladder – have the base of the ladder one foot away from the wall for every four feet in height.
- The top of the ladder should extend safely past the point of rest or landing area, usually about three feet.
- The base of the ladder must be resting on a solid, even surface. Loose gravel, mud, ice, snow, sand or a slight grade are unsafe surfaces.

- Tie or block the base of the ladder, or have someone hold it. Also have someone hold the ladder while you tie it in place at the top.
- If the ladder is to be in a traffic area, barricade it or have it guarded. This is to protect you while you are on the ladder, and for the safety of the people down below.

*Are you ready to climb safely?*

- Use both hands to climb. You should carry your tools on a belt or hoist them up in a basket.
- Make sure your footwear is clean – free of grease or water which could cause you to slip. Your soles should be made of non-slip material, not leather. Never use flat bottom shoes without heels!
- Never climb onto the top few rungs of a ladder.
- Do not over-reach to the side of the ladder; instead take the time to move it.

**Move ladders safely:**

- It may take two or more people to safely bring down a ladder.
- When moving a ladder, be particularly careful to avoid contact with wiring overhead.
- When carrying a ladder, watch the front section so that you do not run into anyone, and the back section so that it does not swing out of control.

*Falls are a leading cause of workplace accidents, and fatalities involving ladders are too common.*