

Ladders and Stepladders Guidance

Ladders and stepladders are not banned under health and safety law.

When Can They Be Used?

As long as they are of the right type, in good condition and effectively secured, ladders can be the most practical option e.g. when the use of other work equipment is not justified because of the low risk and short duration (no more than 30 minutes at a time); or when there are existing workplace or site features which cannot be altered.

However, the law does call for a sensible, proportionate approach to managing risk and so, prior to their use, the use of ladders and stepladders must be risk assessed.

For the purposes of this guidance, references to ladders, unless otherwise indicated, applies to both leaning ladders (sometimes known as extension ladders) and stepladders.

Before Using Ladders

There are some key elements to consider before you use a ladder:

- 1) Is a ladder the right equipment for the job?
 - Ladders may be appropriate if it is a low risk job of short duration (30 mins or less), where an access tower or other equipment cannot feasibly be positioned.
 - 'Short duration' should not be the only deciding factor – make sure there is no other, better, means of access.
 - Ladder must be non-conductive for any electrical work (e.g. fibreglass or timber)
 - Can the work be carried out mostly using only one hand – in general, whilst working on a ladder, it is best to maintain three points of contact at the working position. This means two feet and one hand, or when both hands need to be free for a brief period, two feet and the body supported by the ladder.

Many accidents result from using ladders for a job when a tower scaffold or mobile access platform would have been safer and more efficient.

Also remember that if people have to use a ladder in several places, which requires them to constantly move the ladder, it is possible that carelessness will creep in.

- 2) Is the planned location suitable?
 - Is the ground level and stable? Ladders are only safe when they rest on a firm, level surface. Do not place them on loose bricks, packing or on top of work surfaces.

- Can the (leaning) ladder be secured - More than half of the accidents involving ladders happen because the ladder was not prevented from falling or slipping.
- Is the ladder long / high enough for the task - In order to use a ladder safely, the person should be able to reach the work position from one metre below the top of the ladder. However, the longer the ladder, the more problems there are in using it. It gets harder to handle, is more difficult to foot effectively and it flexes more in use.

Before Using Leaning Ladders

If a ladder is to be used, you must check it is in **good condition**.

Any person using a ladder must therefore visually inspect it before use, each working day:

- **Stiles** – not twisted, bent or dented (could buckle or collapse)
- **Feet** – Not worn, dirty, damaged or missing (ladder could slip)
- **Rungs** – Not cracked, bent, loose or missing (could break or collapse)
- **Locking mechanisms** – Not bent or damaged and able to properly lock.
- **Steps / treads** – Not dirty (you could slip) or loose (could collapse)

If any defects are noted, the ladder must not be used

Make-shift or homemade ladders, or ladders with makeshift repairs, included painted ladders, are not considered to be in good condition and must not be used.

NOTE: Ladders made for DIY use (Class III) may not be strong enough for site work. Ladders used on University premises are expected to meet BS EN EN131 or Class I requirements.

Positioning the ladder:

- On firm ground; not on pallets, bricks, lift trucks, or other moveable objects
- Resting against a solid surface; not glazing, guttering or other fragile items
- Minimising the risk of slipping outwards, i.e. one foot out for every four feet up (75° angle)
- Where not likely to be disturbed e.g. away from doors, vehicles, passers-by.
- Not within 6m of overhead powerlines (unless proven dead or insulated)
- With an exclusion zone, e.g barrier or warning signs, around the work area, or a person to guard it.

Securing the Ladder:

- Both stiles, preferably at the top of the ladder, should be fixed to a solid part of the structure.
- If the ladder cannot be secured, a second person must foot it while it is being fixed and used. (Ladders longer than 5m MUST be secured)

Before Using Stepladders

As with leaning ladders, before a stepladder is to be used, you must check it is in **good condition**.

Any person using a stepladder must therefore visually inspect it before use, each working day:

- **Stiles** – not twisted, bent or dented
- **Feet** – Not worn, dirty, damaged or missing
- **Rungs** – Not cracked, bent, loose or missing
- **Locking mechanisms** – Not bent or damaged and able to properly lock.
- **Steps / treads** – Not dirty or loose
- **Platform** – Not split or buckled

If any defects are noted, the stepladder must not be used

Positioning the stepladder:

- On firm ground; not on pallets, bricks, lift trucks, or other moveable objects
- Resting against a solid surface; not glazing, guttering or other fragile items
- All four feet must be in contact with the ground and the steps level
- Avoid side loading, e.g. side drilling through solid materials.
- Ideally the step ladder should face the activity, not be side on; However, there are occasions when a risk assessment may show it is safer to work side on, e.g. in a stock room when you can't engage the stepladder locks to work face on because of space restraints in narrow aisles, but you can fully lock it to work side on.

When Using A Ladder:

Only carry light materials / tools; preferably in a tool belt. Consider your weight and the tools – check ladder label for max. safe working limit (SWL)

Face the ladder and maintain three points of contact at all times, e.g. two feet plus one hand, or two feet plus knees / chest. Handhold can be lifted for brief moments, e.g. starting to knock in a nail or screw; any longer and other fall protection measures should be considered.

Don't lean or overreach – your belt buckle / naval should stay within the stiles. If you cannot reach, move the ladder (NEVER move or extend a ladder whilst you are standing on it; climb down first)

Do not work off the top three rungs of a leaning ladder. Remember the ladder should extend at least 1m above where you are working. consider whether you are using the right equipment for the task

Do not work of the top three steps of a stepladder (including the very top step / platform), unless there is a suitable handhold. If you must do this, first consider whether you are using the right equipment for the task.

Formal inspections

In addition to pre-use visual checks, all ladders/stepladders purchased for use by University employees should be added to the Crimson insurance inspection data base, to enable insurance inspector to undertake formal inspections.

Details of the ladder/stepladder and storage location should be sent to efsafety@greenwich.ac.uk.

This guidance is only a summary. For more detailed information, please see further guidance from the HSE and the Work at Height Regulations 2005.

(<http://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/the-law.htm>)