

Ladder Safety: Choose, Inspect, Set Up

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Why this matters

A ladder may be in good condition and still be the wrong way to reach the work. The task, load, surface and nearby activity must all fit the access method before someone climbs.

Objective: Decide whether the ladder suits the task and verify its condition and setup.

Key hazards or failure points

Overreaching; excessive load; damaged rails, rungs or feet; unstable support; unsecured traffic exposure; electrical contact; and an unsafe transition at the top.

Practical controls

- Review whether a platform or another approved access method better fits the reach, duration, tools and force needed. Choose a ladder designed for the task and rated for the worker, tools and materials.
- Complete the required inspections. Keep a defective ladder out of service and identify it so another worker does not use it. Do not make improvised repairs.
- Set up on suitable support with the required angle, securing and landing access. Open and lock a stepladder as designed. Keep access clear and protect the ladder from doors, vehicles and other traffic.

Verify It in the Field

- Read the ladder's identification and instructions. Check the actual load and use against its rating and intended purpose. Inspect rails, steps, feet, locks and other components using the required criteria.
- From the ground, check support, stability and securing against the instructions and applicable OSHA provisions. Confirm the top transition and handhold arrangement before climbing; different ladder types have different rules.
- Look for energized equipment or conductors along the ladder and handling route. Confirm required electrical precautions and suitable ladder material. Ask the worker to describe how tools will be moved without losing a safe hold.

Stop and reassess

Stop for a defect, movement, soft or slippery support, changing traffic, electrical uncertainty or work that requires overreaching. Descend safely before changing the setup; never move a ladder while it is occupied. Correct the method, reinspect after an event that could affect safety, and rebrief before use.

Ask the crew

- Does this job fit a ladder, or does the work need another access method?
- What evidence shows this ladder and setup meet the task's requirements?
- What will make us climb down and change the plan?

Select the access method before committing to the climb.

Next step: Record today's changes and checks on the free JSA Planning and Field-Verification Sheet. Supervisor check and attendance are separate.

[Free JSA planning sheet](#)

References: OSHA 1926.1053; ladder-specific manufacturer instructions. Expanded explanation and references accompany the web version.