City of London – Safety Guidance Series

HSG 34
Guidance: Ladder Safety

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Document Control Sheet

Revisions

Version	Page/ Para No	Description of change	Date Approved
00 - 01			**April 2015**

HSG 34 Guidance – Ladder Safety

Contents/Section Quick Links:

Who is this guidance for?
This is for all employees who have to use ladders at work. It is specifically relevant to supervisors and managers who plan and organise work involving ladders.

What is this guidance about?
This guidance details the steps that should be taken to ensure the safe use of ladders. It explains the law about using ladders and working from height. The guidance also gives details on the level of maintenance for ladders and also the provision of information, instruction and training.

This guidance will help you to develop your work at height risk assessments and the safe working practices that must be followed. You must also consider associated hazards such as overhead power lines, weather conditions or nearby moving vehicles.

What type of work can be done from ladders?
Ladders should only be used for work at height when the risk assessment has determined that the use of more suitable means, such as tower scaffolds or mobile elevated working platforms, are not justified because of the low risk. The assessment should also demonstrate that their use is of short duration and that existing features of the site cannot be altered. Ladders are best used as a means of getting to a workplace. They should only be used as a workplace for short-term light work.

However, this kind of work can still be dangerous - many ladder accidents happen during work lasting less than 30 minutes. The longer the ladder, the more problems there are in using it safely. It gets harder to handle, is more difficult to foot effectively and it flexes more in use.

What can I do to reduce the risks?
Many accidents result from using ladders for a job when a tower scaffold or mobile access platform would have been safer and more efficient.

Make sure light tools are carried in a shoulder bag or holster attached to a belt so that both hands are free for climbing – three points of contact should always be available. Heavy or bulky loads should not be carried up or down ladders - a gin wheel or other lifting equipment should be used instead.

For safe working the ladder needs to be strong enough for the job and in good condition:-

- Check the stiles are not damaged, buckled or warped, no rungs are cracked or missing and any safety feet are not missing;
- Do not use makeshift or home-made ladders or carry out makeshift repairs to a damaged ladder;

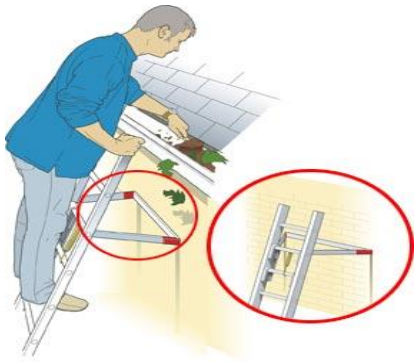
- Do not use painted ladders, as the paint may hide faults,
- Ladders made for DIY use are not strong enough for site work and must not be used.

Check the ladder is secure. More than half of the accidents involving ladders happen because the ladder was not prevented from falling or slipping. Ladders are only safe when they rest on a firm, level surface strong enough to support the ladder and keep the rungs horizontal. Do not place them on unsuitable surfaces such as loose bricks or packing. They should also be secured by rope or other suitable anti slip or stabilisation devices. Such devices must ensure that the ladder does not: -

- Run sideways; or
- Slide away from the wall.

Also, make sure:

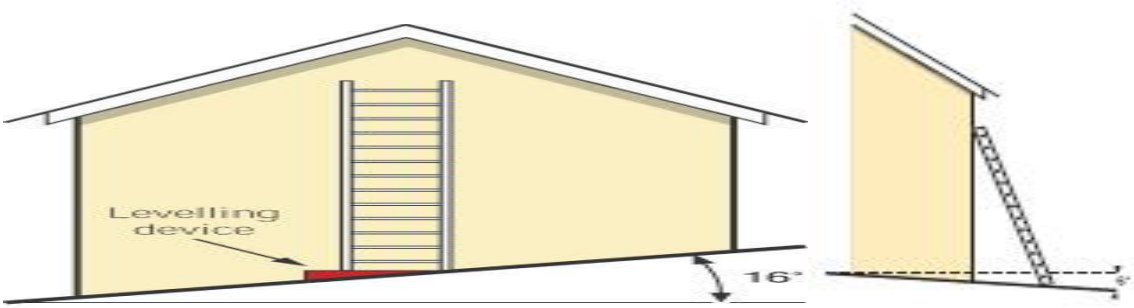
- The ladder is angled to minimise the risk of slipping outwards; as a rule of thumb the ladder needs to be 'one out for every four up';



- The top of the ladder rests against a solid surface; ladders should not rest on fragile or other insecure materials such as cement sheet, or plastic guttering;

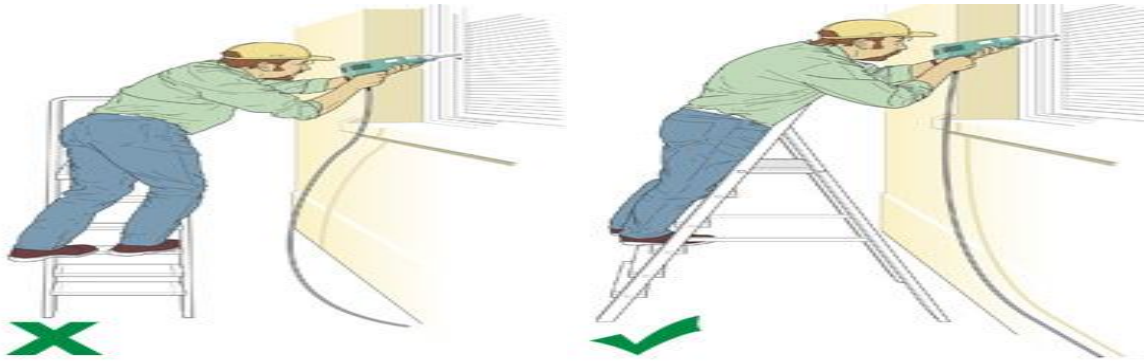
- Both feet of the ladder are on a firm footing and cannot slip;

- The ladder is secured from falling. This will usually be by fixing at the top, or sometimes the base;



- If the ladder cannot be fixed, a second person foots the ladder while it is being used (this also applies while the ladder is being fixed);
- The ladder extends a sufficient height (about 1 m) above any landing place where people will get on and off it unless some other adequate handhold is available; and
- Where ladders are used in a run measuring a vertical distance of more than 6m, suitable landing areas or platforms are provided. The only exception to this relates to some steeplejacks' ladders which may not have landing places this often. Nevertheless, provide as many landing places as possible. Also in the case of interlocking or extension ladders that they are not used until the sections are prevented from moving relative to each other in use.

And remember if ladders are to be used, make sure the work can be reached without stretching;



Note: Access over three storeys should be achieved by safe means other than ladders.

What about information, instruction and training?
Any employee who uses ladders at work should be competent to do so and have undergone a suitable ladder safety training course. For simple equipment a toolbox talk by a suitably competent person may be appropriate, and this must include how to inspect a ladder to ensure it is safe and suitable for the intended use.

What about maintaining ladders and inspections?
The user should visually inspect each ladder before use. A ladder checklist with register is attached to this guidance note – see **Appendix 1 & 2**. If defects are found the ladder must not be used.

Inspection test tag on all ladders should be examined before use to ensure in test date.

As well as visual checks before, ladders should be subject to a periodic thorough examination by a trained competent person. The frequency of thorough examinations will be determined by the nature of the work but should not be greater than 1 year between examinations. The findings of the thorough examination should be recorded in a logbook.

Ladders should be numbered which should cross reference with the logbook.

Aluminium ladders must be replaced after 20 years' service due to degeneration of aluminium. No ladder which are at the end of their service life or are defective should be gifted.

What about purchasing new ladders?
Class 1 Industrial Use BSEN131 ladders are recommended.

Class 3 Domestic Use i.e. from B&Q etc. is not to the desired standard and must not be used. Any wooden ladder still in use should be replaced as soon as possible unless they are used for a specific purpose e.g. certain types of electrical work.

Where can I get further advice?
Contact Corporate Health and Safety on 020 7332 3307/ 1440

Further information

Health and Safety Executive (2014) – INDG 455 Safe Use of Ladders and Stepladders

Health and Safety Executive (webpages) – Work at Height Access and Information Toolkit

Health and Safety Executive (2014) – INDG 401 (Rev2) Working at Height: A Brief Guide

Health and Safety Executive (webpages) Using ladders and stepladders safely

Appendix 1: Ladder Inspection Checklist

Date _____
Ladder Description / I.D Number _____

Item To Be Checked	Satisfactory (Y/N)?	Needs Repair
GENERAL		
Loose steps or rungs (consider loose if they can be moved by hand)		
Loose nails, screws, bolts, or other metal parts		
Cracked, split or broken uprights, braces, steps or rungs		
Slivers on uprights, rungs or steps		
Damaged or worn nonslip bases		
STEPLADDERS		
Wobbly (from side strain)		
Loose or bent hinge spreaders		
Broken Stop on hinge spreaders		
Loose hinges		

Ladder Inspection Checklist Page 1 of 3

Item To Be Checked	Satisfactory (Y/N)?	Needs Repair
EXTENSION LADDERS		
Loose, broken, or missing extension locks		
Defective locks that do not seat properly when the ladder is extended		
Deterioration of rope		
TROLLEY LADDERS		
Worn or missing tires		
Wheels that bind		
Floor wheel brackets broken, loose or missing		
Floor wheels and brackets missing		
Ladders binding in guides		
Ladder and rail stops broken, loose and missing		
Rail supports broken or section of rail missing		
Trolley wheels out of adjustment		

Ladder Inspection Checklist Page 2 of 3

Item To Be Checked	Satisfactory (Y/N)?	Needs Repair
TRESTLE LADDERS		
Loose hinges		
Wobbly		
Loose or bent hinge spreaders		
Stop on hinge spreader broken		
Centre section guide for extension out of alignment		
Defective locks for extension		

Ladder Inspection Checklist Page 3 of 3

Appendix 2: Quarterly Ladder/Stepladder Inspection Register for (Insert Location)

Identification Number	Type of Ladder/Stepladder	Inspection Date	Satisfactory Yes / No	Action Taken	Signature

Equipment which fails must be taken out of use immediately and prominently labelled until repaired or disposed of.

Periodic Ladder/Stepladder Checks

CHECK: *Use the Ladder Inspection Checklist in* ***Appendix 1***

NOTE:

- Staff using ladders should carry out a visual check for signs of damage and that the ladder is safe before use.
- Named member of staff responsible for inspecting ladders should carry out a recorded inspection of all ladders on site.
- Ensure that all ladders are secured at all times to prevent unauthorised use.
- Training will depend on the type of intended use and the results of any working at heights risk assessment.