

March 2026

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As part of your job, you may have to complete a wide array of tasks throughout the day. On the other hand, you may only focus on one or two tasks for your entire shift. No matter if you are completing a few or many different work tasks, there are multiple factors that need to be considered, and actions taken to ensure a work task is completed safely and efficiently.

Human Performance Factors

Some of the most important focus items that you should pay attention to prior to a work task beginning is human performance factors. These factors affect your ability to complete a job safely and efficiently. Some human performance factors include illness, fatigue, knowledge, focus, attention, understanding, stress, etc. It is important to understand how and when these different factors are limiting your ability to complete a work task safely.

Tools and Personnel

After you consider the factors that could possibly affect you at an individual level during the task, you need to ensure that you have the correct tools for the job. You must also consider whether the correct personnel are present for the work task as well. Having the correct tools and personnel in place prior to a work task beginning ensures that you can complete it safely and efficiently. When the correct tools or personnel are not in place, then shortcuts are often taken to make up for the missing parts of the equation, which puts everyone at risk.

Implementing Safeguards

Taking the time to go through the proper steps to ensure all the safety procedures are followed and all the necessary safeguards are in place is critical. Every single safeguard is important. The more safeguards that are put into place and are followed for a work task, the less likely an incident will occur that results in injury or property loss. Considering human performance factors and ensuring the correct tools are in place are two basic safe work practices. There can be many more that need to be put into place before a work task can begin.

Summary

There are many things that need to be considered prior to a work task beginning- even just a simple one. While this talk may make it seem like it is a drawn-out process, for most tasks, it is not. It is just a reminder to think about all the different considerations that need to be thought of as well as actions that need to be taken prior to a work task beginning. Proper preplanning is critical to the safe and efficient operations of every work task.

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[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart X]

Over time, mountains break down into boulders, and eventually those break down into rocks, and then rocks are slowly reduced to gravel, sand, and silt. This transformation is due primarily to the effects of weather; Wind, rain, and temperature all contribute to reducing a mountain into a pile of dirt. Weather can have detrimental effects on portable ladder use too. So, here are a few things to keep in mind to help avoid long and short-term weather-related problems affecting portable ladders.

- Wet ladders are more slippery than dry ladders; that is obvious. Therefore, your foot is more likely to slip off a ladder rung, especially if the soles of your shoes are muddy. Also, the base of your ladder can slip much easier on the ground or other work surface when they are wet.
- Water also causes ladders to slowly deteriorate. Metal parts like spreaders, rivets, and other fasteners can slowly corrode when constantly exposed to moisture. And even though corrosion damage may take months or even years to occur, damaged parts lack the strength of the original parts and can eventually bend or break. In addition, warnings and instructional stickers applied to ladders by ladder manufacturers will often tear or come off when they are exposed to prolonged moisture.
- Ladders that are allowed to lie in water can become waterlogged. This primarily affects wooden ladders. And while we probably all recognize that a waterlogged wooden ladder will deteriorate quicker, this condition can also cause what is normally considered a non-conductive ladder to conduct electricity. This increases the risk of electrocution if the waterlogged ladder is used while working on or near energized electrical lines or equipment.
- Combining the effects of water and freezing temperatures can create ice on the ladder or on the bearing surface where the ladder is sitting. And if you think a wet ladder or work surface is slippery, an icy one can be many times more slippery!
- All other things being equal, some ladders constantly exposed to direct sunlight will wear out quicker than ones that are not. That is because the ultraviolet, or UV, light from the sun will slowly deteriorate the fibers in wood and fiberglass ladders over extremely long periods of time. But one other effect of UV rays is that warnings and instructional stickers applied to ladders by

manufacturers will eventually fade much quicker and eventually become illegible.

- Wind gusts can make your ladder - or even you - unintentionally move or fall over. Depending on the speed of the wind, this might occur whether you are standing on the ladder or not! So, avoid using a portable ladder when the wind is gusting at high speeds, and be sure to tie off the top of your extension ladder so that any unexpected wind gust does not cause it to move or fall over.

While these are not the only potentially hazardous effects that weather can have on our portable ladders, they are some of the most common ones that we can try and avoid during use and storage.

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