November 2025

- 11-3-2025 - TBT - Accident Prevention Tips for Working on Portable Step Ladders
- 11-10-2025 - TBT - 12 Helpful facts about Cold Stress Prevention at Work
- 11/17/2025 - ToolBox Talk – Explaining Near Misses
- 11-24-2025 - Toolbox Talk: Basic Excavation Safety

11-3-2025 - TBT - Accident Prevention Tips for Working on Portable Step Ladders

11-3-2025 Toolbox Talk: Accident Prevention Tips for Working on Portable Step Ladders [Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart X]

Portable step ladders can be invaluable when it comes to getting the job done quickly. Using a portable step ladder improperly while performing your job can also get you seriously injured or killed. So, we will discuss some additional tips to keep in mind when performing work on portable step ladders.

• Use the right length of step ladder for the job. If your ladder is too short to allow you to safely reach the work point, *Do Not* use makeshift devices such as boxes or pallets to gain extra height; instead, take the time to go and get a taller ladder.

• When possible, you should set up your ladder in a manner to face the work head-on. But when that is not possible (such as when you need to work on a wall or other flat vertical surface), set up your portable step ladder so it runs parallel to the wall or flat vertical surface; then reach over beside you to reach the wall or vertical surface. You must never lean a folded step ladder up against the wall or other vertical surface (unless using one of the specially designed ladders specifically manufactured for this purpose), as they can easily slip.

• Only use the rungs or steps designed for use by the manufacturer for climbing a ladder. Under no circumstances should you climb up the braces on the back side of a portable step ladder (unless your step ladder is specifically designed with rungs or steps on both sides).

• Always stand on the lowest ladder rung possible to safely perform your work. *Do Not* stand on or above any ladder rung designated by the ladder manufacturer as not safe for use. In addition, Never stand or sit on the top cap of a portable step ladder, nor should you ever “straddle” the top of a portable step ladder by placing on foot on a ladder rung and the other on a brace on the back of the ladder. Finally, *Do Not* ever step on the folding paint shelf.

• Always maintain as many points of contact as possible when working from a portable step ladder. Face the ladder, keep both feet firmly planted on the same ladder rung or step, and maintain a grip with one hand on the ladder when possible. Should it become necessary to use both hands to perform work for a short period of time, keep both feet firmly planted on the same ladder rung or

step, and support the upper portion of your body by leaning your chest, thighs, or knees forward against the ladder. Avoid leaning back if reaching overhead, as this could cause you to fall backwards from the ladder.

• Keep your body centered and keep as close to ladder as possible. Avoid reaching too far to one side or the other, as this can cause you to lose balance, or can cause the ladder to fall over to one side. A good rule of thumb to minimize over-reaching is to keep your belt buckle located between the side-rails of the ladder. Even better, try to keep your sternum (the point at the center of your chest) located between the side rails.

Finally, remember that a portable step ladder may not be suitable for every task; in some cases, it may be better to utilize a scaffold or other device to get the job done safely.

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11-10-2025 - TBT - 12 Helpful facts about Cold Stress Prevention at Work

11/10/2025 TBT - 12 Helpful Facts About Cold Stress Prevention at Work

1. **Cold Stress Can Happen Above Freezing** – Many workers think cold stress only happens in extreme cold, but **temperatures as high as 50°F**, combined with wind, wet clothing, or exhaustion, can still lead to hypothermia.
2. **Wind Chill Makes It Worse** – The **wind chill factor** can make temperatures feel much colder than they are. A 20°F temperature with a 20-mph wind can feel like **5°F**, increasing the risk of frostbite and hypothermia. (See our short video on this topic below).
3. **Wet Clothing Drastically Increases Heat Loss** – Water conducts heat away from the body **25 times faster than dry air**, so wet clothing—whether from sweat, rain, or snow—can rapidly lead to cold stress. **Stay dry to stay warm.**
4. **Frostbite Can Happen in Minutes** – In extreme cold, **exposed skin can develop frostbite in as little as 10-15 minutes**. Workers should wear insulated gloves, hats, and face coverings when working in freezing temperatures.
5. **Hypothermia Doesn't Always Look Obvious** – A worker with hypothermia might just seem **confused, clumsy, or unusually tired**. If someone **stumbles, slurs their speech, or appears disoriented**, they need to be warmed up immediately.
6. **Layering Clothing is Key** – The best way to stay warm is by wearing **three layers**: a moisture-wicking base layer, an insulating middle layer (like wool or fleece), and a waterproof outer layer to block wind and moisture.
7. **Dehydration is Still a Risk in Cold Weather** – Workers lose fluids through sweat and breathing, even in the cold. **Drinking warm fluids** like soup or tea, along with plenty of water, helps maintain hydration and circulation.
8. **Breaks in Warm Areas Are Essential** – Workers should take **frequent breaks in a heated shelter** to prevent prolonged exposure. Short, regular

warm-up periods are better than working continuously in the cold.

9. **Alcohol and Caffeine Can Increase Cold Stress Risk** – Alcohol gives a false sense of warmth by drawing heat away from vital organs. Caffeine can reduce circulation. **Water, warm decaffeinated tea, or electrolyte drinks** are the best options.
10. **Cold-Related Illnesses Can Happen Indoors Too** – Unheated buildings, poorly insulated work areas, and **cold storage facilities** can put indoor workers at risk. Proper PPE and warm break areas are just as important inside as they are outside.
11. **Older Workers Are at Higher Risk** – Workers over **50** may have a harder time regulating body temperature and noticing early signs of cold stress. They should take extra precautions and warm up more frequently.
12. **Numb Fingers and Toes Mean It's Time to Warm Up** – If a worker loses feeling in their fingers, toes, or ears, that's an early sign of frostbite. **Immediate rewarming** in a warm area can prevent permanent damage.

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11/17/2025 - ToolBox Talk – Explaining Near Misses

IDENTIFY

Call it a close call or a near miss, we've all had one — probably a lot more than one. They're incidents that almost happened but didn't, or incidents that did happen, but no harm or damage was done.

If you are like many workers, you probably did little more than breathe a sigh of relief and carry on with whatever it was you were doing. Very often, however, such incidents could have been worse and have occurred due to factors that could have been controlled.

It's hard, if not impossible, to control those factors if no one knew about them. The scary part is that the difference between a near miss and an injury, death, or significant property damage can be a split second or a tiny distance.

Taking near misses seriously, which starts with reporting them, is recognized as a good way to anticipate and prevent harmful situations rather than simply reacting after they happen. Remember, nobody gets in trouble for reporting an incident or near miss. Sometimes it's a condition you can fix right away, other times it requires specialized attention.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

So, what, exactly, is a near miss? One widely accepted definition is, "an incident or unsafe condition with potential for injury, equipment damage, or property damage."

Determining whether it should be reported isn't always easy, but even a seemingly trivial event should not be brushed off if it could easily happen again to someone else, with more serious results.

Reporting near misses is pointless unless something positive is done with the information. Near misses should be managed like any other hazard — investigated, prioritized, and corrected.

Once a near miss is identified, it must be reported promptly, preferably in writing, by either the person who identified it or by a supervisor to whom it was reported verbally by someone else. Report forms are useful and should be kept as simple as possible.

As much as possible, the "blame game" should be avoided. Any systems for dealing with near misses cannot be fully effective unless everyone understands the preventive value of reporting them and is comfortable doing so without fear of getting into trouble.

You should report a near miss even if you have removed the hazard or corrected the problem. Why? Many near misses are signs of larger safety problems that require attention, such as:

- Poor housekeeping.
- The need for an ongoing maintenance plan.
- Poor work area layout.
- Faulty work procedures or equipment.
- Insufficient training in safe work practices and procedures.

Proper investigation will reveal what caused the near miss and what priority should be given for further action. Near misses should be investigated as if someone had been injured, equipment damaged or property damaged.

Sometimes there is more than one cause, which can be either immediate or underlying. An immediate cause can be an unsafe condition such as a mechanical failure, or it could be an unsafe action by an employee. The underlying cause could be a missing machine guard or a crowded work area.

When the investigation determines that the near miss was serious enough to warrant preventive steps, they could involve:

- Eliminating the cause of the hazard.
- Reducing the potential hazard level or degree of risk of exposure to it.
- Installation of safety devices.
- Installation of warning signs.
- Implementation of new safe work procedures.
- Increased worker awareness of the hazard, such as through safety talks.

These steps should be taken as soon as possible, communicated to all affected personnel, and monitored to ensure they have been effective.

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11-24-2025 - Toolbox Talk: Basic Excavation Safety

Sloping or benching the walls of an excavation can help prevent cave-ins IF they are cut to the required slope and angle. So never enter an excavation, even if the walls appear to be adequately sloped or benched, unless the Competent Person has cleared the excavation for entry. In addition, here are a few more safety tips to keep in mind when working in or near sloped or benched excavations:

• You don’t want something falling or rolling down into the excavation and striking someone. So always make certain that materials and equipment located outside of sloped or benched excavations are kept at least two feet or more away from the edges. And if necessary, use stakes, wedges, or chocks to secure rolling objects such as pipes or wheeled equipment in place and keep them from accidentally rolling or getting knocked into the excavation.

• Before you enter a sloped or benched excavation, as well as during the time you are inside the excavation, take a moment to check the soil along the top edges and sides of the excavation for signs of distress. This includes the formation of fissures or cracks forming parallel to one or more of the top edges of the excavation, bulging of the vertical face of the lower portions of the excavation, sloughing or spalling of the soil from the vertical faces of the excavation, and small amounts of material such as pebbles or little clumps of material suddenly separating from the face of an excavation and trickling or rolling down into the excavation (a condition called raveling). Report any signs of distress to the Competent Person so they can inspect the excavation and address any hazardous conditions if necessary.

• Avoid climbing up or down the sides of sloped or benched excavations to enter or exit unless you have been cleared to do so by the Competent Person. Even though they may appear to be safe to climb, the angles and steps of sloped and benched excavation walls are usually too steep for a person to walk on safely, and that can lead to you stumbling and falling. Unless the Competent Person confirms that the slopes or steps have been designed and constructed at angles and dimensions acceptable for walking up and down, only enter and exit excavations through means approved by the Competent Person. This includes means such as a properly installed portable ladder or properly constructed ramp designed by a Competent Person. One last thing; when working in trench excavations that are 4 feet or more in depth, always make sure your ladder, ramp, or other means of exiting the trench are located to require no more than 25 feet of lateral travel.

• Do NOT work on the sides of sloped or benched excavations at levels above other persons, unless measures approved by the Competent Person are installed. Examples include safety barricades or shields that ensure the people below are protected from hazards created by dropped tools, sliding

or falling materials or equipment, or even falling people.

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