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

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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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