

Spot The Safety Violation: A Lesson in Ladder Safety



Should this teacher really be sitting on the top cap of this step ladder'



Ladders are common equipment in workplaces ranging from factories and constructions sites to hospitals and schools. But if workers use this ubiquitous equipment improperly, they could put themselves at risk of injury'or worse.

This photograph shows a teacher preparing a school for the new semester by hanging a 'Welcome Students' banner. Fortunately no students were around to see the dangerous manner in which the teacher was using this step ladder. The top cap of a step ladder isn't designed to be sat or stood on under any circumstances. And it doesn't help that she's wearing flip flops, which aren't safe or appropriate shoes to be wearing while on a ladder.

It's true that this ladder isn't very tall. But a fall from it to the hard floor below could still result in serious or fatal injuries.

Example: A grocery store worker in Ontario was arranging items on shelves while standing on the top cap of a step ladder. He lost his balance and fell to the floor, suffering a fatal head injury. The MOL found that it was common practice in the store for workers to stand on the top cap of this type of ladder. The grocery store pleaded guilty to a safety offence and was fined \$80,000 [TKPL & Associates Ltd., Govt. News Release, Sept. 14, 2012].

ANSWER THESE 10 STEP LADDER SAFETY QUESTIONS

Your workplace must comply with the requirements under the OHS laws for portable ladders, including step and extension ladders. To ensure that workers use this equipment safely, require them to answer these questions:

1. Is the ladder tall enough to let me do the job without standing on the top cap' (If not, get a taller ladder or use other equipment for the work, such as scaffolding.)
2. Is the step ladder on a flat, stable and hard surface' (Step ladders need to be on flat surfaces and shouldn't be set up on other elevated platforms.)
3. Are all four feet touching the ground so that it doesn't rock'
4. Is the surface hard enough to prevent it from creeping and settling once it's loaded'
5. Is the ladder itself and the area around the bottom of it clean and clear of loose materials that can create a trip or slip hazard'
6. Is the ladder clear of any doors that can swing open and hit it'
7. Are both spreaders that create the A-frame of the ladder fully engaged and locked'
8. If the ladder's being used in a public area, such as a hallway, is the work area marked off to warn passing individuals'
9. Is the setup clear of any electrical hazards, such as overhead power lines'
10. Is the ladder free of anything that could increase the risk of slipping on the rungs'

You should also have workers inspect ladders before using them to ensure they're not damaged or otherwise unsafe. (See, ladder inspection form) And supervisors can use this step ladder safety checklist to ensure that workers properly set up, move on and work from step ladders.