

Spot The Safety Violation: As Unsafe as It Gets



Could this worker possibly be doing this job in a less safe manner'

One of the most common pieces of workplace equipment is the

ladder. Step ladders and extension ladders are used in many types of workplaces, from manufacturing plants and construction sites to stores and warehouses. But just because ladders are common and easy to use doesn't mean that workers will use them properly or safely.

Case in point: This photograph shows a worker using a step ladder in about as unsafe a manner as possible. First, the ladder isn't quite tall enough for the task. But instead of getting a taller ladder or a different piece of equipment, such as a scaffold, the worker opted to balance the legs of the ladder on four buckets.

Second, even with the ladder precariously balanced on the buckets, it still wasn't tall enough. So the worker is standing on the top cap so he can reach the lighting fixture. But the top caps of step ladders aren't designed to be sat or stood on under *any* circumstances.

Finally, the dangers created by the above errors in judgment are compounded by the fact that the worker isn't wearing any fall protection, which would likely be required given how high up he is. And if he should fall, he's likely to be seriously injured or worse.

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

STEP LADDER SAFETY TIPS

Ensure that your workplace [complies with the requirements](#) under the OHS laws for portable ladders, including step and [extension ladders](#). And to ensure that workers use this equipment safely, give them these tips from [WorkSafeNB](#):

Position the ladder properly.

- Fully open the step ladder on a level surface and lock its spreader in place.
- Never use a step ladder folded up and leaning against a surface. Use an extension ladder instead.
- Ensure a proper size, type and grade of ladder is used for each task. Avoid using household ladders on job sites.
- Ensure the ladder isn't near any [overhead power lines](#) or other electrical hazards.

Use a ladder that's long enough.

- Never climb, stand or sit on the top cap or shelf of a step ladder.
- Never place the step ladder on unstable surfaces, such as buckets or scissor lifts, to gain extra height.

Climb and use the ladder carefully.

- Maintain three-point contact (such as one hand and two feet) with the ladder while climbing.
- Brace yourself with your free hand.
- Always face the step ladder treads while climbing.
- Never overreach or lean to one side while using a step ladder. Always keep your shoulders within the rails.
- Never carry heavy or bulky objects that may make going up or down a ladder unsafe.
- Always wear appropriate fall protection when required.

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.