

Spot The Safety Violation: Being on Top Isn't Always Best



Is this worker properly and safely using a step ladder? What's he doing wrong?

Ladders are common equipment in many workplaces. Ladders let workers easily and safely access areas they couldn't otherwise reach or could only reach unsafely. But although ladders are very helpful, improper use of them can endanger workers.

A safety professional sent Bongarde Media this photograph of a worker standing on the top cap of a step ladder at a Canadian airport. But the top cap of a step ladder isn't meant to be stood on under any circumstances. And it's especially unsafe in a busy airport where a rushing traveler could easily knock the ladder off balance and cause the worker to fall.

Although this ladder isn't that tall, a fall from it 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 failing to provide appropriate equipment to reach shelves for the protection of a worker and was fined \$80,000 [TKPL & Associates Ltd., Govt. News Release, Sept. 14, 2012].

11 STEP LADDER SAFETY QUESTIONS

It's important that your workplace [complies with the requirements](#) under the OHS laws for all kinds of ladders. To ensure that workers use this equipment safely, require them to ask themselves 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 bottom of the ladder clear of loose materials that can create a trip or slip hazard when stepping on/off the ladder'
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 busy airport, 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 clean of loose debris and dry'

11. Is it 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 are properly setting up, moving on and working from step ladders.