

# Spot The Safety Violation: Decorating Shouldn't Be Dangerous



What do you think happened here and how could it have been avoided'



During the holidays, some companies may hang decorations such as lights, snowflakes, etc. in the workplace to make it more festive. Workers should take care when hanging decorations, whether inside or outside of the workplace, especially if they're using ladders.

[This picture](#) actually shows a staged scene that's a dummy, not a real person, hanging from the house's eaves. I guess the home owner thought the image of a guy who appears to have fallen off a ladder while putting up lights was funny.

Safety professionals probably feel otherwise. But we can use a photograph of this ill-conceived holiday scene to illustrate some important safety points.

## HOLIDAY LIGHTS SAFETY TIPS

Holiday decorations, especially lights, can pose certain safety hazards. Here are some tips from the [Ontario government](#) to help you avoid injuries and electrical fires when displaying strings of lights:

- Always buy electrical products that have a recognized certification mark like 'CSA' (from the Canadian Standards Association) on the package.
- Read the manufacturer's instructions before installing holiday lights and decorations.
- Make sure you hang lights where they're meant to be used—that is, hang outdoor lights outside and indoor lights inside.
- Stay clear of [power lines](#) when decorating outdoors. (Take [these four steps](#) to protect workers around overhead power lines.)
- Don't overload electrical outlets with plugs and extension cords.
- Check for frayed or damaged electrical cords, light strings and extension cords.
- Remove lights as soon as you can after the holiday season—they're not intended for year-round use.

Also, take care when using [other holiday decorations](#) in the workplace, such as trees, wreathes, angel hair, fake snow, etc.

## **SAFE PORTABLE LADDER USE TIPS**

It's likely that decorating the workplace will involve the use of ladders to some extent. So make sure that workers follow these safe ladder use tips.

When using portable ladders, workers **SHOULD**:

1. Try to maintain three points of contact with the ladder at all times.
2. Carry tools in a tool belt or raise and lower them with a hand line.
3. Ensure that their shoes/boots are clean and have slip-free soles.
4. Face the ladder and stand in the centre of the side rails.

5. Secure the ladder from moving or have a co-worker hold it. For example, if the ladder in the photo had been properly secured, it wouldn't have tipped over and left the 'person' hanging from the roof.
6. Ensure the legs of a step ladder are fully extended and locked in place.
7. Make sure they and their materials don't exceed the ladder's load limit.

But workers **SHOULD NOT**:

1. Work from either of the [top two rungs, steps or cleats](#) or the bucket/pail shelf of a portable ladder unless the manufacturer's specifications allow the worker to do so.
2. Carry heavy or bulky materials or any object that may make going up or down the ladder unsafe.
3. Splice or lash ladders together to extend their length.
4. Place ladders in front of or against a door unless the door is blocked in the open position, locked or otherwise guarded.
5. Use a ladder as scaffold flooring, support for scaffold flooring or a horizontal walkway.
6. [Place a ladder on a box, barrel or other unstable base.](#)
7. Move a ladder while someone is on it.

To further ensure that your workers safely use portable ladders:

- Train them on the [requirements under the OHS laws for portable ladders](#) and your safety rules for such equipment.
- [Quiz](#) workers to ensure they understood their ladder training.
- Require workers to [inspect ladders](#) before using them to ensure that they're in good condition.