Spot The Safety Violation: Sometimes Three Ladders Aren't Better than One



Should we applaud this worker's ingenuity or discipline him for a very unsafe practice'

One of the fastest ways for a worker to get hurt is to use the wrong tool or equipment for the job. For example, the worker in this picture should be using one step ladder that's tall enough to give him safe access to the light fixture. (He could also use a scaffold or scissor lift.) Instead, he has precariously balanced a too short step ladder on planks attached to another too short step ladder and what appears to be an extension ladder. This flimsy arrangement could fail at any moment, causing the worker to fall and likely suffer serious injury.

Here's another example of workers using the wrong ladder for the job.

Bottom line: Ladders should always be set on solid, level ground. And for step ladders, all four feet should be firmly on the ground. Don't set up a ladder on top of another piece of equipment.

Some additional step ladder safety tips:

- Always face the treads when using a step ladder.
- Never use a step ladder for entry to or exit from another work area.
- Never lean to one side or overreach while using a step ladder.
- Unless permitted by the manufacturer, never use a step ladder as a support for a working platform as the ladder is too unstable.
- Always visually inspect the ladder before each use.
- Always place a step ladder on a firm, flat surface.
- Don’t place a step ladder on boxes or scaffolds to gain extra height.
- Always take care when positioning a step ladder in corridors or driveways where it could be hit by a person or vehicle. Set up suitable barriers where necessary.

To 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.
- Provide ladders of the appropriate lengths and types for workers to use.
- Require workers to inspect ladders before using them to ensure that they’re in good condition.