

Spot The Safety Violation: Step Ladders & Extension Ladders Aren't Interchangeable



Should a worker be using a step ladder in this manner?



Step ladders and extension ladders are both common pieces of equipment used by workers to give them access to areas they couldn't otherwise reach. But these types of ladders aren't interchangeable—that is, although you may be able to use either a step or an extension ladder for a particular task, they can't be used the same way.

In this picture, the worker is using a step ladder as if it was an extension ladder by leaning it against the wall instead of opening it up into an A-frame. If the worker *did* open and lock the step ladder, it appears that it would've been adequate to allow him to safely wash the window. But by using the step

ladder like an extension ladder, he unnecessarily put himself in danger.

Here's an example of workers using an extension ladder for a job that required a step ladder.

When using a step ladder, workers should make sure that:

- The ladder is on a flat, stable and hard surface;
- All four feet are touching the ground;
- The surface is hard enough to prevent the ladder from settling once the worker gets on it;
- The ladder isn't set up on an elevated platform, such as scaffolding;
- The bottom of the ladder is clear of materials, tools and debris;
- The ladder is clear of any doors that could open and hit it;
- Both spreaders are fully open, engaged and locked;
- The work area is marked off to warn any passers-by;
- The ladder is clean, dry and free of any loose debris; and
- The ladder isn't near any electrical hazards.

14 Dos & Don'ts of Safe Portable Ladder Use

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.
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 objects or any other 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.

Make sure that you understand the requirements under the OHS laws for portable ladders, such as step and extension ladders. For example, workers should generally inspect ladders before using them to ensure that they're in good condition.