

MARCH IS NATIONAL LADDER SAFETY MONTH!

The American Ladder Institute has declared March 2017 as the National Ladder Safety Month. Every year there are over 300 deaths in ladder-related accidents, thousands of disabling injuries, and thousands more ladder related close-calls/near-misses that go unreported. This is especially significant for Washington workers as ladder incidents are three times higher here than the rest of the nation, and unfortunately ladder safety was the 4th most cited violation in Washington State during the L&I fiscal year 2016.

A large contributor to the rising statistics of ladder incidents in WA could easily be related to the major growth of our city and the rising exposure due to all the work, but that should be no excuse. In our line of work as mechanical construction workers, we have a very high exposure to using ladders routinely. In my opinion, a ladder is one of those tools we see and use so often that we mentally don't classify it as a potential safety hazard which may cause some complacency when working on them. Conversely, if we were to pick up a tool such as a ban saw, grinder, torch, etc., then something instinctively would recognize the danger in those tools, and we would ensure that the proper protection and precautions are being used while working. But a ladder... harmless right?

Sometimes it is the simplest tool or task that can cause the most damage, and it only takes a small fall to cause permanent damage. So let's take a look at the basics of ladder safety and ensure we are using them properly:

Select the proper ladder

- Always use the right ladder for the right job.

Inspection before use

- Look for missing or loose cleats at the bottom.
- Look for loose or missing screws, bolts or nails on job made ladders
- Look for cracked, broken, split, dented or badly worn rungs, cleats or side rails.
- Remove from service if damaged

Determine the duty rating

Look for nearby hazards

- Don't set your ladder in a walkway or door opening.

Safe setup

- Keep the area at the top and bottom of the ladder clear of tool cords, tools, material and garbage.
- Always set the ladder on solid footing.

4-to-1 ratio

- Use the 4-1 angle on the slope of the ladder when setting up a straight or extension ladder.

Access to upper landing surfaces

- When using extension ladders, three (3) top rungs must extend beyond the landing platform. (Or the top of an extension ladder must be 36" (3 feet) above the landing.)

Hands free

- Do not carry tools or materials on a ladder. Use both hands when climbing a ladder to grab onto the side rails. If it is necessary to move material or tools up a ladder, first climb up, then pull up the work with a hand line.

Use ladders for their intended purpose

- Step ladders should never be used in the closed position
- Spreaders on step ladders should always be in the locked position

Proper storage