TOOLBOX TALK

LADDER SAFETY

Ladders can be a great tool when you need to reach an elevated area but if not used properly, their use can also result in injuries. Each year, approximately 30,000 workers are injured from falls involving ladders and ladder substitutes. The 3 most common causes of ladder accidents are: 1) using the wrong ladder for the job; 2) using a ladder that is in poor condition; 3) using the ladder improperly. Most of these accidents are preventable with proper ladder safety.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LADDER FOR THE JOB

Although there are many different types of ladders, the most commonly used are self-supporting step ladders (A-frame) and extension ladders. The following points and questions should be considered when choosing the right ladder for a particular job:

- How high is the area that you need to reach?
- Is the surface for the ladder base flat and dry?
- What is the total load? Ladders have load ratings so remember to include the weight of both the worker AND materials. Typical load ratings range from 200 Lbs to 375 Lbs
- Are anyh power lines or exposed wiring near the working area? Non conductive, fiberglass ladders should be used in these situations.
- Is the ladder in good working condition?

INSPECTIONS

A common contributing factor in ladder accidents is using a damaged ladder, or a ladder that is in poor condition. Ladders have a shelf life and over time, can show signs of wear and tear. When inspecting a ladder, the following points will help determine if it is still usable or should be removed from service:

- Do the braces lock into place on a step ladder?
- Are there dents, cracks or stress marks in the rungs?
- Do the rungs twist or rotate?
- Is the ladder bent or dented? This may compromise the load capacity of the ladder.

- Is the label in place and legible?
- Is the ladder free from paint and other corrosive materials? Wooden ladders should never be painted
- Does the ladder have proper footing? If an extension ladder, does it have safety feet?
- Is the ladder level? Never use a ladder that wobbles or rocks
- Are the side rails cracked?
- Is the ladder free of slippery materials?

PROPER LADDER USE

Many accidents can be prevented by simply using the ladder as it was designed.

- Always face the ladder and maintain 3 points of contact when climbing and descending a ladder.
- NEVER stand on the top 2 rungs of a ladder (unless stated on the label by the manufacturer)
- Do not over reach while using the ladder. A good rule of thumb is the "belt buckle" rule - keep your belt buckle within the rails of the ladder.
- An extension ladder should extend 3 feet above the working surface and must be secured at the top and bottom
- When choosing an extension ladder, use the 4 to 1 rule-1 foot away from the wall for every 4 feet of ladder height. Example: If the roof is 16 feet high, the footing/base will be 4 feet away from the wall. If the ladder is too steep, it can fall backwards on you; if it is not steep enough, it can "kick out" and collapse.
- NEVER "jump", "walk" or "hop" a ladder. Always climb down the ladder to reposition it.
- When "spotting" an extension ladder, hold the rails not the rungs.
- Do not overload the ladder.

Although ladders are a useful, simple tool, be mindful of the thousands of injuries caused every year by improper use and conditions. Most ladder injuries can be prevented by considering these points. Remember to ask yourself, what is the task? Is it in good condition? How will you use the ladder?

Contact your supervisor or Production Safety Department for more information.