

## The Inspector's Corner: Ladder Safety Tips

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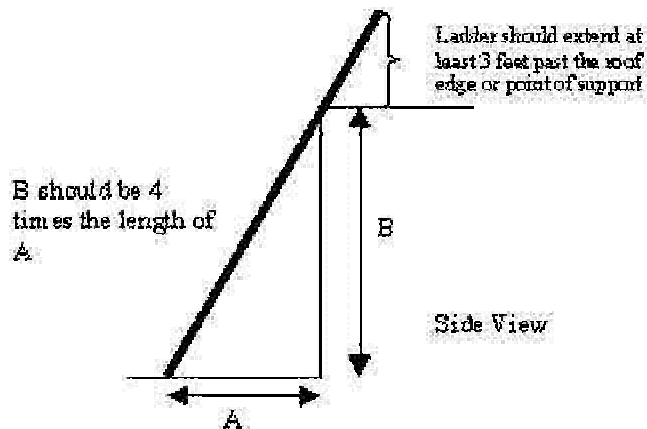
With warming weather comes the chores that require us to pull out our ladders to clean gutters, wash windows, trim trees and paint trim. Portable ladders are one of the handiest, simplest tools we use. Because of their effectiveness, ladders are used to perform many different tasks. Although most ladders are simple to use, planning and thought are still required to use them safely. Each year in the U.S., accidents involving ladders cause an estimated 300 deaths and 130,000 injuries requiring emergency medical attention. As a fireman and a home inspector, I use ladders on a regular basis and it is easy to take them for granted. I have deliberate steps I take every time I set my ladder up to maintain my safety.

Ladder accidents usually are caused by improper selection and improper use of a ladder. Some of the more common hazards involving ladders, such as instability, electrical shock, and falls, can be easily prevented. Prevention requires proper planning, correct ladder selection, safe work procedures.

There are three types of portable ladders: stepladders (A-frame), straight (extension) ladders and multi-purpose ladders. These can also be made out of different materials, including metal, wood, or fiberglass. Most residential ladders will be aluminum or wood. I use a lightweight aluminum 6' stepladder and 20' Little Giant multipurpose ladder for my inspections

Always look at where you are going to use your ladder. I look for trees, electrical wires and other overhead obstacles. The ground where you are raising the ladder should be relatively flat should not be slippery. If you are raising an extension or multi-purpose ladder to the roof, always try to extend it at least 3 feet above the roof edge. Make sure the ladder extension locks or dogs are locked and tie the rope around the rungs. On multipurpose ladders the locks should be engaged. The foot of the ladder should be spaced 1 foot away for every 4 feet it reaches up. An easy way to check the angle is to stand with your feet against the base of the ladder and extend your arms toward the ladder. If you have the correct angle, your hands should easily grasp the rungs. If it is a windy day take a bungee cord with you and wrap the bungee around the top rungs and attach to the gutter. This ensures a strong gust won't blow down your ladder. Take special care when ascending or descending a ladder. Hold on with both hands when going up or down. If you have a help have them steady the

ladder while you are on it. Always face the ladder when ascending or descending. Be sure that your shoes are not muddy or slippery before you climb. If your ladder does not adequately reach your objective, try to find another ladder or location that allows the ladder to extend beyond the roof edge.



#### 10 Safety tips:

- Do not hand-carry loads on a ladder.
- Non-skid feet or spurs may prevent a ladder from slipping on a hard, smooth surface.
- Do not stand on the ladder's top three rungs. Do not work from the top or top step of a stepladder.
- Always have 3-point contact (such as, one hand and two feet).
- Keep your body centered between the side rails of the ladder – so you don't tip over the ladder. If you can't easily reach the item you are working on, re-position your ladder
- Never use a ladder that has been damaged.
- The base should be spaced 1 foot away for every 4 feet it reaches up (see illustration).
- Ladders used to reach a roof should extend beyond the roof edge preferable 3 feet.
- Stepladders should be securely spread open. Never use a folding stepladder in an unfolded position.
- Beware of the electrical lines. When you are on the ladder or working on the roof. They may look innocent but can cause severe shock and injury.

Lastly, if you are going to work on your roof, beware of the pitch or angle of the roof. It is always easier to walk up the roof than down it. I never walk on metal, tile or slate roofs and rarely on wood shake roof. I also rarely avoid a wet or snowy roof. Those surfaces offer questionable traction and if I run into a problem I want all the grip I can get. If the roof looks pretty steep when you get to the top of your ladder, then it is and may not be safe for you to walk on. In the long run, it will be easier to hire a professional than to try it yourself and get hurt.

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