

Five Tips for Ladder Safety in Your Climbing Facility

Climbing Wall Association Lines Newsletter, October 2014

From route setting to rescues and general maintenance, ladders are widely used in climbing facilities. Many ladder safety recommendations and regulations (primarily from OSHA) are common sense measures, but it is always a good idea to re-examine your practices and see where you can improve or become compliant. Here are five ladder safety tips to help you minimize risks and stay in compliance along with a few resources.

Provide the correct equipment and training

OSH law's [list of employer responsibilities](#) includes "Make sure employees have and use safe tools and equipment and properly maintain this equipment" and "...provide safety training in a language and vocabulary workers can understand". If your employees use ladders, be sure to provide the proper equipment and training. Select a ladder that is built for your intended use and can withstand the loads that will be imposed on it ([OSHA 1926.1053b3](#)).

Use equipment correctly

When assessing whether or not to use a ladder, here are a few questions to ask ([Ladder Safety: Page 3](#)). If you decide the ladder is the best tool for the job, be sure to engage the spreader bar and lock it into place for a-frame ladders and secure the base of non-self-supporting ladders. To prevent falls or tipping, do not stand on the top of the ladder or the top step when working ([OSHA 1926.1053b13](#)). Use non-self-supporting ladders with the base approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the ladder's working length from the wall (i.e. the base of a 20 ft ladder would be placed 5 ft from the base of the wall)([1926.1053\(b\)\(5\)\(i\)](#)).

Maintain equipment

OSHA standards advise against using ladders that are bent, missing steps, or if the spreader bars do not lock ([1926.1053\(b\)\(15\)](#) and [1926.1053\(b\)\(16\)](#)). To prevent these issues, inspect ladders before and after use (checking for visible defects) and store ladders in areas where they will not incur damage. Always mark damaged ladders with clear language that is plainly visible to potential users. When in doubt, refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the maintenance and storage of ladders.

Consider your work area

Falling items and uneven surfaces pose hazards to workers and passersby. Place ladders on an even surface away from doors or other potential hazards ([1926.1053\(b\)\(6\)](#)). While working from a ladder, secure the ladder's base and use a barrier of some type to prevent others from walking under or nearby. If ladders are being used near doors that may swing open, either lock/barricade the door or secure the ladder so it will not become displaced ([1926.1053\(b\)\(8\)](#)). Always step off of ladders and remove any loose items before attempting to relocate to a new workspace.

Work smart

If you are using heavy objects like holds or tools, use tool lanyards and a haul/anchoring system (specifically in the case of hold buckets and large holds/volumes) that will help prevent falling items. Climbing ladders with heavy items in hand can result in less than three points of contact with the ladder, which is not recommended ([1926.1053\(b\)\(21\)](#)).

These tips are not exhaustive – please reference the resources below for a full explanation of OSHA regulations and recommendations regarding ladder use in the workplace.

Resources:

OSHA: Ladders in construction - <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3625.pdf>

OSHA: Employer Responsibilities - <https://www.osha.gov/as/opa/worker/employer-responsibility.html>

OSHA: 1926.1053 re: ladders - https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=10839

OSHA: 1910.26 re: portable metal ladders - https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=9718