

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: More Accident Prevention Tips When Working On Extension Ladders

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart X]

Used properly, portable extension ladders can help us get the job done quickly and safely. But as we have discussed in previous toolbox talks, using a portable extension ladder improperly or that is damaged can also get you hurt or killed. So today we will discuss some additional tips to help keep you safe when using a portable extension ladder.

- **Use the right length of portable extension ladder for the job.** If your ladder is too short to allow you to safely reach the work point, **DO NOT** set it on makeshift devices such as boxes or pallets to gain extra height. And **NEVER** should you lash two separate ladders together to make one longer ladder! Instead, take the time to go get the proper length ladder.
- **Do not use your portable extension ladder as a horizontal walking or working surface.** Extension ladders are **NOT** designed to be laid horizontally across saw horses to use like a scaffold board, nor are they to be laid over a trench or other opening for use as a walk board; you can easily lose your balance and fall, or the ladder could even break and fail.
- **Only one person at a time should use a portable extension ladder.** Under no circumstances should two people be climbing on, nor working off of, one extension ladder at the same time (*unless your portable extension ladder is specifically designed for simultaneous use by two people*).
- **Always stand on the lowest ladder rung possible to safely perform your work.** Do not stand on or above any ladder rung designated by the ladder manufacturer as unsafe for use. Also, do not work with one foot supported on a ladder rung while your other foot is supported on another surface; this may cause the ladder to slide to one side and make you fall.
- **Always maintain as many points of contact as possible when working from a portable extension ladder.** Face the ladder, keep both feet firmly planted on the same ladder rung or step, and maintain a firm grip with at least one hand on the ladder when possible. Should it become necessary to use both hands to perform work for a short period of time, keep both feet firmly planted on the same ladder rung, and support the upper portion of your body by leaning your chest, thighs, or knees forward against the ladder. Avoid leaning back if reaching overhead, as this could cause you to fall backwards from the ladder.
- **Keep your body centered as closely as possible on the ladder at all times.** Avoid reaching too far to one side or the other, as this can cause you to lose balance, or can cause the ladder to fall over to one side. A good rule of thumb to minimize over-reaching is to keep your belt buckle located between the side-rails of the ladder at all times. Even better, try to keep your sternum (the point at the center of your chest) located between the side rails.

Last but not least, remember that a portable extension ladder may not be suitable for every situation; in some cases it may be better to use a scaffold or other device to get the job done safely.

Does anyone have any additional tips to share for working safely from a portable extension ladders? Thank you for your participation, and please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending today's training session.