

Take a big step up with ladder safety

BY JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recently published statistics that illustrate the dangers of ladder accidents.

In the United States more than 500,000 people a year are treated for ladder-related injuries, and that number doesn't include people who suffered injuries but didn't go to a medical care provider for treatment.

About 300 people in this country die from ladder-related injuries annually.

Estimated annual cost of ladder-related injuries is \$11 billion, including work loss, medical, legal, liability and pain-and-suffering expenses.

You can avoid becoming one of these statistics by having the right ladder for the job and using it properly.

The notion that ladder safety

begins when you place your foot on the first step is wrong.

Ladder safety really begins when you shop for a ladder — a daunting task considering all the choices.

First is ladder style — step or extension? Often you will need both. A stepladder can be used indoors and outdoors, but has height limitations.

An extension ladder is used primarily outdoors where extra height is needed, as in the case of a two-story home. An extension ladder can be useful indoors where unusually high ceilings exist.

Size, strength

Next is size. When it comes to ladders, size matters. For stepladders, the ladder's height plus 4 feet equals the total reach. For example: A 4-foot ladder can be used to reach an 8-foot ceiling. Use a 6-foot ladder

to reach a 10-foot ceiling, and so on.

For an extension ladder, the base and upper sections must overlap. So, a 20-foot extension ladder is only good for about 17 feet. The ladder must travel above the roofline to 3 feet so that it can be used for balance as you climb onto the roof.

Ladders are sold by "duty rating" — how much weight a ladder is rated to carry. The more weight it will hold, the stronger it must be.

The American National Safety Institute (ANSI) establishes duty rating. The five duty ratings and their respective load capacities are as follows:

- Type IAA specific duty — 375 pounds
- Type IA extra heavy duty — 300 pounds
- Type I heavy duty — 250 pounds
- Type II medium duty — 225 pounds

pounds

■ Type III light duty — 200 pounds. When in doubt, always err on the side of a heavier duty rating.

Material

The final step in choosing a ladder is construction material. The choices are wood, aluminum and fiberglass.

The oldest and most familiar ladder is wood. Wood ladders have a solid, sturdy feeling. However, the fact that they are heavy makes them a bit cumbersome and somewhat difficult to transport. Also, wood must be regularly maintained to prevent cracking, splitting and rotting. Wood is economical and is said not to conduct electricity when clean and dry.

If you do lots of electrical work, we suggest that you choose a fiberglass ladder.

Ladders made from high-strength aluminum are a lightweight, rot-free alternative to wood.

But aluminum ladders have been around long enough to prove that they don't last any longer than wood. Salt air or chemicals can corrode — and weaken — an aluminum ladder in no time.

Fiberglass has become as popular as aluminum was when it first replaced wood.

Fiberglass ladders are lighter than wood but heavier than aluminum. They aren't subject to rot, they don't bend easily and they come in several attractive colors. Manufacturers say that

they will last generations — just what they said about aluminum.

We know that plastics and resins oxidize in the same fashion as all other carbon-based materials. Only time will tell whether fiberglass will last longer than the others.

Rules for use

Choosing the right ladder is only part of the safety equation. Proper use and maintenance will help ensure that you don't become one of the unfortunate statistics that we mentioned earlier.

Always read and abide by the instruction labels and stickers on a ladder before setting foot on it. Failure to do so could have devastating consequences.

Make a thorough inspection to be sure it's safe and in good working order. There's no excuse for using an unsafe ladder.

Even a perfectly good ladder can be unsafe if not used properly.

Here are some rules and a few tips that could help prevent a ladder accident in your home, and perhaps serious injury:

Rule 1: Never use a worn-out ladder. In some instances they can be repaired, but more often than not, it is advisable to get a new one.

Rule 2: Never use a ladder unless it is rated to carry your weight. Ladders are rated by the amount of weight that they can carry. If the salesperson at the store can't tell you the weight that the ladder is capable of carrying, find another store.

Rule 3: Use a ladder that is the right length for the job. For stepladders, the ladder's height plus 4 feet equals the total reach. And that warning at the top, "this is not a step," means just that. For an extension ladder, the base and upper sections must overlap.


Rule 4: Rest the ladder properly. Don't rest the high leg on a block of wood or a brick. Instead, dig a hole for the lower leg.

Also, don't stand the ladder up at too little or too great of an angle. The safe angle is about 75 degrees. Remember, too much angle reduces the ladder's strength and not enough angle could cause you to tip over backward. Seventy-five degrees is an angle equal to when the minute hand of a clock is directly in between the 12 and the 1, or 75 degrees from the 3.

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HOURS: Monday & Thursday 8:30-8:00 • T-W-F 8:30-5:30 • Saturday 9:00-4:00

DESIGN CALENDAR

■ Beyond Thread, Beyond Fiber, an exhibit by the Needlework & Textile Guild of Michigan, will be featured June 22 to July 19 at the Oakland County Galleria, 1200 N. Telegraph in Pontiac. Reception 6-8 p.m. Friday, June 21. Galleria hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday. For information, call the Office of Arts, Culture & Film at (248) 858-0415.

Clear slow drains

BY MORRIS AND JAMES CAREY
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

What's worse than the "drip, drip, drip" that results from poor water pressure? How about the "gulp, gulp, gulp" of a slow drain. The old cliché, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is right on the money when it comes to drains.

Cooking grease, coffee grounds, hair and soap suds are a few of the biggest enemies of a drain. Cooking grease should be

saved in an old coffee can or cardboard milk container. Coffee grounds are a welcome addition to a mulch pile.

And a majority of hair and soap suds can be caught with a screen or grate. A safe and effective way of clearing a clogged drain is to pour a half-cup of salt, a half-cup of baking soda and a half-cup of vinegar down the drain.

Follow this concoction with at least 2 quarts of boiling water.

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