



Construction Safety Quick Take
LADDERS

Portable ladders are frequently misused on many projects. In the construction industry, ladder misuse leads to a significant number of serious and disabling injuries each year and in some cases results in fatalities. In terms of observations at Harvard specifically, ladder use accounts for:

- 1. 4th highest number of unsafe observations amongst categories tracked.**
- 2. 2nd highest number of high hazard observations amongst categories tracked.**
- 3. Top 3 unsafe ladder observations:**
 - a. Proper Use Of Ladder**
 - b. Type 1A Ladders**
 - c. Inspected For Defects**

Improper Ladder Use

96% of unsafe observations involve the improper use of stepladders. Commonly observed improper uses of stepladders include (most frequent to least frequent):

- 1. Standing on the top step or top platform.**
- 2. Using a stepladder in the closed position leaning against a wall or other surface.**
- 3. Using a stepladder for access between working levels.**
- 4. Straddling a stepladder or sitting on the top platform.**
- 5. Facing away from the stepladder while working.**
- 6. Setting the stepladder up on an unstable work surface.**

Unsafe observations related to extension ladder use have included carrying materials up or down the ladder and not securing the ladder to prevent accidental displacement.

Many of these observations are likely a result of either a lack of training or a lack of planning.



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To eliminate the significant hazards that can be associated with unsafe ladder use:

1. **TRAIN:** Ensure that all employees using portable ladders have received ladder safety training in accordance with OSHA Standards and manufacturer's recommendations.
2. **SELECT:** Identify the proper type (step or extension) and size (height/length) portable ladder to be used for the task. Confirm, based on work area conditions, that a portable ladder is the right choice for the task. Is there a more practical solution (baker staging, scissor lift, etc.)?
3. **INSPECT:** Inspect work areas and ladders daily. Are there hazards in the work area that would impact the ability to use a portable ladder safely? Can the portable ladder be set up properly based on conditions in the work area? Is the ladder in good condition?

Harvard-Specific Ladder Safety Requirements

1. Only Type 1A portable ladders, rated for 300 lbs., are approved for use on Harvard projects.
2. Ladders must be inspected prior to each shift. Damaged or defective ladders must be removed from service immediately.
3. When used to access higher or lower levels extension ladders must be secured at the top and base.
4. Aluminum or metal ladders are not allowed on construction sites, with limited exceptions.
5. Aluminum extension ladders are allowed only for exterior work under specific circumstances.
6. Fall protection IS required for portable ladder use when:
 - a. The working height of the employee is equal to or greater than 10 feet (feet are at or above 10 feet).
 - b. The ladder is erected within 15 feet of an open edge, window, hole, or shaft regardless of the presence or non-presence of guardrails.

Relevant Exhibits: [Equipment Safety](#) [Fall Prevention and Protection](#)