Safe Portable Ladder Setup, Step by Step



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?
The improper setup of portable ladders is responsible for the majority of ladder-related injuries and death, both at work and at home.

What's the Danger?
Many people are so focused on the task they need to complete at height that they don't take the time to examine the ladder for defects and set it up properly. Being several feet in the air is not the best place to discover that you haven't fully extended and locked the spreader bars on a stepladder, or that one of its legs isn't level with the others.

How to Protect Yourself

Follow these steps for safe portable ladder setup:

- Provide even, level support for ladder feet. You can build up the surface with firm material, like leg levelers, mudsills, or packed dirt.
- Place the ladder on a dry surface. The ladder can become unstable if it sinks into wet ground during work.
- Never set up a portable ladder in front of a door unless the door is locked or a guard is posted.
- Don't place a ladder on an unstable base to gain height. This includes boxes, barrels, or the back of a vehicle. If you're adding height this way, it means you aren't using the right size of ladder. Rethink your ladder selection and how you're going to do the job.
- If you're using a stepladder, lock the spreaders. If you're using an extension ladder, secure the lock assembly.
- Secure the ladder at the top and bottom if necessary. The more you secure the ladder, the safer you'll be!
- Never move, shift, or extend a portable or vehicle-mounted ladder while it is in use. Never!
- Use the two-person carry technique for handling heavy or long ladders. Have one worker stand on each end of the ladder. Each person should lift the ladder by bending at the knees, then balance the side rail on the same side shoulder. Use your hands to hold a ladder rung and support the ladder while you walk.

- If you carry a ladder alone, balance the center of it on your shoulder. The front end should be elevated slightly above your head and the back end slightly below your head. The base of the ladder should be behind you.

FINAL WORD

Ladder setup shouldn’t be rushed or haphazard. Your life may depend on how you set up your ladder