While ladder manufacturers strive to produce the safest ladders possible, a well-made ladder is not enough. Our safety while climbing or working on a ladder depends on following safe work practices: choose the correct ladder for the job; inspect the ladder before use; set up the ladder properly; and, use the ladder in a safe and proper manner. This program discusses the basic precautions that will keep employees safe when using ladders. Viewers will also see the consequences of failing to follow these safe work practices.

**PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:** After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:
- What to look for when inspecting a ladder before use;
- How to properly place and set step and straight ladders;
- How to stand and work on a ladder properly;
- Why ladders shouldn’t be intentionally misused.

**INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:**

**BACKGROUND**
- Ladders are used to reach elevated areas in just about every type of job, industry and at home. While there are many types of ladders and countless jobs performed with these valuable tools, the basic safety rules are similar for all ladders.
- Most of us are aware of these rules; yet, we often choose to ignore them, often taking our safety for granted when using ladders. Unfortunately, this nonchalant attitude leads to 300 deaths and 165,000 injuries each year.
- Our safety while on a ladder depends on following safe work practices: first, choose the correct ladder for the job; secondly, inspect the ladder before use; third, set up the ladder properly; and, finally, use the ladder in a safe and proper manner.

**SELECTING THE CORRECT LADDER**
- The two most common types of ladders are the step ladder and the straight ladder. Straight ladders can be a single ladder or an extension ladder that can be adjusted for additional height.
- Because aluminum ladders conduct electricity, they should never be used while performing electrical work or where they may come in contact with live electrical parts.
- Wooden ladders may contain hard-to-spot weaknesses and defects, especially if the ladder has been painted. This is why you should never paint a wooden ladder and always inspect them thoroughly before use.
- When selecting a ladder, make sure the ladder is long enough to reach the height you need and allows you to work comfortably. Many injuries and deaths occur when people try to work from a ladder that’s too short.
- Make sure the ladder is sturdy and strong enough to support the working load. The working load is the combined weight of your body and the work materials to be used while on the ladder.
- If you have any questions about the appropriate equipment for your job, ask your supervisor.

**INSPECTING THE LADDER BEFORE USE**
- Keep in mind that ladders may become damaged with use. This is why you should conduct a thorough inspection of the ladder’s condition before using it.
- Check the side rails for cracks, dents, fractures and other defects.
- Check for loose or damaged rungs and braces. Be sure to clean off any slippery substances you discover on these parts.
- Also, make sure that screws, bolts, hinges, rivets and other hardware aren’t loose or missing.

**TRANSPORTING YOUR LADDER**
- After a thorough inspection, your ladder is ready for use; however, be sure to transport it safely to your work area.
- You should carry a straight or extension ladder parallel to the ground. Hold the side rail in the middle of the ladder so you can balance it.
- Of course, many ladders are long and heavy, requiring two people to carry them safely.

**PLACING THE LADDER**
- When arriving in the work area, the ladder must be set up properly to prevent injury.
- Be particularly aware of overhead power lines or other exposed live electrical parts.
- If you must use the ladder in an area with a great deal of traffic, you should set up a barricade or have a co-worker serve as a watch to prevent collisions.
- Be aware that working from a ladder may present hazards to people below. Setting up a barricade or posting a watch can also protect pedestrians from falling objects.
• Try to avoid erecting a ladder directly in the path of a doorway. If you must, be sure the door is secure and have a co-worker stand watch to prevent mishaps.
• Whenever possible, place the ladder on a solid, level surface. Make sure the area around the base of the ladder is uncluttered.

SETTING UP THE LADDER ON UNEVEN/UNSTABLE SURFACES
• Of course, you won’t always be able to find a solid, level surface to place the ladder on. If the soil or surface isn’t firm, you should place a flat board underneath the feet of the ladder to keep it stable.
• The board should be in good condition and large enough to provide adequate stability and support. Using boards that are too small or aren’t sturdy enough can lead to injury.
• Bricks, stones, boxes or similar times are prohibited by the company and dangerous, often leading to disaster.
• For additional stability, a ladder can be tied off to a sturdy, immobile object with a rope or stabilizing strap. This will keep the ladder from slipping or sliding sideways while you work.

SETTING UP A STRAIGHT LADDER
• To ensure a stable base of support for a straight ladder, it should be placed one foot away from the wall for every four feet the ladder rises. For example, if the ladder contacts the wall at twelve feet, the feet of the ladder should be placed three feet from the wall.
• When using the ladder to access a higher elevation, it should extend three feet higher than the surface being accessed and be tied off securely. Failing to do this makes it very difficult to get on and off the ladder and can easily lead to a fall.
• Also, the upper and lower sections of an extension ladder should overlap to provide stability. Generally, this should be about three feet, but ladders extended over 32 feet in length should overlap even more.

PREPARING TO CLIMB & CLIMBING THE LADDER
• Never climb with any object or load that may cause you to lose your balance and fall.
• Inspect your shoes for slippery substances and make sure your shoes are tied before stepping on the ladder.
• Always face the ladder squarely and maintain three-point contact when climbing by having one hand and two feet or two hands and one foot on the ladder at all times.
• Take your time going up; don’t be in a rush. One common reason for ladders falling is the base of a ladder kicking out when workers climb too fast.

STANDING & WORKING ON THE LADDER SAFELY
• While on any ladder, do not lean beyond the side rails. Your belt buckle should always stay between the two rails.
• Only climb on the ladder as intended; stay off of the paint shelf, spreaders or back section. Also, do not sit on or straddle the top of a step ladder.
• Only one person at a time should stand on or climb a ladder. The movements of a second person can cause the ladder or the other person to become unbalanced. Also, the weight of the second person could overload the ladder.

INTENTIONAL MISUSE OF LADDERS
• While many ladder-related deaths and injuries occur when safe work practices aren’t followed, a large percentage of these injuries occur when ladders are intentionally misused.
• Tying two ladders together to gain height is an all too frequent and dangerous practice which should never be attempted.
• Workers often “walk” or “bounce” the ladder by rocking it from side to side to move it. This is very dangerous. It’s much easier and safer to climb down the ladder and reposition it.
• While a folded-up stepladder may look like a good substitute for a straight ladder, it isn’t. It is designed to rest on four feet.
• Another common mistake is attempting to use a chair, a box or other item in place of a ladder. Even worse, some people try to use pallets or lift truck forks when a ladder is required; only use approved step stools or ladders.
• Often when a platform or scaffold isn’t available, workers will lay down a ladder and use it instead. Ladders are only designed for vertical applications and should never be used in a horizontal position.
• If you find yourself tempted to commit one of these unsafe acts, you may want to think twice about the consequences. Even falls from relatively small heights can result in big injuries.