



ALERT

PORTABLE LADDERS

- **May 2010**—This safety alert is published following two recent incidents where painters fell from ladders and suffered serious injuries, one being a fatality. In both cases the painters used portable ladders and were working at a height of approx. 5 metres.
- Workcover reminds employers and those in control of the work site that the use of ladders should only be considered if other safer alternatives, such as scaffolding or elevating work platforms, are not reasonably practicable.

Occupational Health and Safety Requirements

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 requires employers and those in control of workplaces to take all necessary steps to ensure that safe systems of work are implemented, maintained and supervised, and that persons undertaking them are provided with adequate information and training to ensure their safety.

The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001, Clause 56 provides more specific obligations on preventing falls from heights.

The Codes of Practice Safe Work on Roofs: Part 1—Commercial and Industrial and Safe Work on Roofs: Part 2—Residential Buildings provides employers, self-employed people and workers with practical advice on preventing injury to people engaged in work on roofs, including the use of ladders.

Risk Controls

There are limits to the safe use of a ladder and they should only be used to carry out light duty work of short duration. Domestic ladders must not be used in an industrial environment. Industrial ladders have a load rating of 120kg or more, whereas domestic ladders only have a load rating of 100kg.

The controls identified in this safety alert are not exhaustive and a number of measures could be integrated into the system of work to ensure the risks are effectively controlled. The following are some of the control measures that should be considered:

- Ensure safer access systems—e.g. scaffolding and elevating work platforms are used as a first resort. Only use ladders if these other systems are not reasonably practicable.
- Ensure the ladder is suitable for the task, in good working condition and fitted with rubber (or similar non-slip material) feet.
- Ensure the supporting surface is adequate, that it is level and the ladder will not sink into or slide on it.

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- Ensure the ladder, when leaned against the wall or edge, has a ratio of height to horizontal distance from wall of 4:1 and is secured (devices are available to secure the ladder at the top and bottom).
- Ensure you always have three points of contact while ascending, descending or working from the ladder.

Further Information

Safeworkaustralia.gov.au—National code of practice for the prevention of falls in general construction

Safeworkaustralia.gov.au—National code of practice for the prevention of falls in housing construction

