

TOOLBOX TALK

BRIEFKIT

Ladders & Stepladders

A ready-to-deliver toolbox talk for foremen and supervisors. 8-10 minute spoken script plus briefing register for operative sign-in.

REFERENCE	TBT-LADDER-SAFETY-001	DURATION	8-10 minutes
DATE		SITE	
TRAINER (PRINT)		SIGNATURE	

1 Why it matters

Falls from height are the biggest killer in construction, and a lot of them are off ladders doing a quick job. The danger with ladders is exactly that, they feel quick and harmless, so people skip securing them, overreach, or grab the wrong one. A ladder is fine for the right task done properly. It turns dangerous the moment it's used as a working platform for a job that needs proper access, or used carelessly because it's only for a minute.

2 PPE required for this task

Hard hat

Close-fitting workwear, nothing loose to catch on rungs

Sturdy footwear with clean, good-grip soles

3 What to say

Spoken script for the supervisor. Read or paraphrase, in order.

1 When a ladder is the right tool, and when it isn't

A ladder is for low-risk, short jobs, light work, somewhere you can keep one hand free, and a rough guide is no more than about half an hour in one position. If the job's longer than that, heavier, or higher risk, it needs a tower, a podium or a MEWP instead. The ladder is for getting up to do a quick job, it is not a working platform for the day. If you find yourself rigging a ladder up to spend the afternoon on it, that's the wrong call, come and see me.

2 Pick the right ladder and check it before you climb

Use the right ladder for the job and the right length, so you're never forced onto the top rungs to reach. Before you go up, look it over: stiles not bent, rungs not loose, cracked or missing, feet present and not worn smooth, and on a stepladder the locking bars working. Never use a painted ladder, because paint hides cracks and splits. If it's damaged, it gets quarantined or binned, not made do with. A two-second look beats a fall.

3 Set it at the right angle, 1 in 4

A leaning ladder goes at about 75 degrees, the 1-in-4 rule, one unit out at the base for every four up. Too steep and it tips back on you, too shallow and the feet slide out. It has to sit on firm, level, clean ground, never on bricks, pallets or anything stacked to gain a bit of height. And when it's for access onto something, it should stick up about a metre, three or four rungs, above where you step off, so there's something to hold as you get on and off.

4 Secure it, every time

Tie the ladder at the top to both stiles wherever you can, that's the proper way. If you genuinely can't tie the top, use an effective stability device, and only as a last resort have someone foot it, which really only works for low, short jobs up to about three metres. An unsecured ladder sliding out from under someone is how most ladder falls happen. Footing it with a hand on the bottom rung is the weakest option, not the default.

5 Three points of contact, and don't overreach

Keep three points of contact, two feet and a hand, or two hands and a foot, the whole time you're up there. That means you can't be carrying tools or materials up in your hands, use a tool belt or hoist them up on a line. And don't overreach: keep your belt buckle, your navel, between the two stiles. The second you're leaning out past the stiles, get down and move the ladder. Moving it three times is quicker than a trip to A&E, every time.

6 Stepladders have their own rules

Open a stepladder out fully and make sure the locking bars or cords are engaged before you put weight on it. Don't stand on the top step, or the one below it, unless it's a platform step actually designed to be stood on. Face the work, don't work side-on, because the sideways push is exactly what tips a stepladder over. And never use a stepladder folded up as a leaning ladder, it's not made to take the load that way.

7 Watch electrics and weather

Never use a metal or wet ladder near live electrics or overhead lines, use a non-conductive fibreglass one for any electrical work. Don't use ladders outside in strong wind, and watch for wet or icy rungs in the morning. And clean the mud off your boots before you climb, because a slip off the bottom rung still breaks ankles. Most of this is common sense, but it's the quick jobs where people stop thinking.

4 Common mistakes to call out

Using a ladder as a working platform for a long or heavy job that needs a tower, podium or MEWP

Not securing the ladder, not tied at the top and nobody footing it

Wrong angle, too steep or too shallow instead of 1 in 4 (about 75 degrees)

Standing on the top rung of a leaning ladder or the top step of a stepladder

Overreaching instead of getting down and moving the ladder

Carrying tools or materials up by hand instead of using a belt or hoist line

Using a damaged or painted ladder (paint hides cracks and splits)

Standing the feet on bricks, pallets or uneven ground to gain height

Using a metal ladder near live electrics or overhead lines

Working side-on off a stepladder so it tips over

5 Watch on site this week

What the supervisor should be actively spotting on walk-arounds.

Ladders being used as a working platform for long jobs that need proper access

Unsecured leaning ladders, not tied and not footed

Ladders at the wrong angle or on uneven or made-up ground

Operatives on the top rungs of a ladder or top step of steps

People overreaching rather than repositioning the ladder

Tools being carried up by hand with no tool belt or hoist line

Damaged, bent, painted or homemade ladders in use

Stepladders not fully opened or with locking bars not engaged

Metal ladders near electrical work or overhead lines

Muddy boots, wet or icy rungs, or ladder use in high wind

6 Confirm the team understood

Ask one or two of these at the end of the talk.

1. What angle should a leaning ladder be set at? (1 in 4, about 75 degrees, one out at the base for every four up.)
2. You've a quick job but can't tie the ladder off at the top. What are your options? (Use a stability device, or have someone foot it as a last resort for low short work, otherwise get different access.)
3. How do you know if you're overreaching? (If your belt buckle goes past the stiles you're too far over, get down and move the ladder.)
4. When is a ladder the wrong tool for the job? (Long, heavy or higher-risk work that needs a tower, podium or MEWP instead.)

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Briefing register: Ladders & Stepladders

All operatives who attend this toolbox talk must sign below. Their signature confirms they have heard and understood the briefing.

Briefing delivered by:

Name (print):		Date:	
Signature:		Time:	
Site:			

Attendees. I confirm I have heard and understood the briefing detailed above:

#	Name (print)	Company / Role	Signature	Date	CSCS / Ticket No.
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Keep this register in the site Safety File. Additional sheets may be appended if more than 12 operatives are briefed.

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This is a generic toolbox talk for industry use. It is not site-specific. Site-specific risk assessments and method statements are a separate document.