

Toolbox Talks 2

060: Unsafe Acts: Ladders

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review the company's ladder safety policies. Note what sizes and types of ladders are available on this job.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts with ladders.

Discussion notes:

Some ladder facts to think about

- A large percentage of injuries to electricians are ladder-related.
- Ladder-related injuries are almost never due to defective ladders. They are nearly always due to improper use of ladders.

Unsafe acts with ladders

- Using an aluminum ladder. Never use an aluminum ladder. Use only ladders that have rails constructed of wood or fiberglass. Metal steps are OK, but don't use ladders that are essentially one big conductor.
- Carrying things up a ladder. It's true that not everything can ride along in a tool pouch or pocket. But carrying something up a ladder uses a hand that should be used for safe climbing. Having someone throw parts or tools up to you is also unsafe. The bucket and rope method is a safe way to raise needed parts and tools.
- Hanging things from ladder steps. Why add something to slip on?
- Exceeding the weight limit of the ladder. The weight limit is printed on a portable ladder. It includes everything, not just the weight of the person on the ladder.
- Allowing more than one person on a ladder at a time. Usually, this will exceed the weight limit of the ladder. Think about the other dangers this presents (e.g., one person can fall on another, fingers get stepped on). In an emergency, such as a rescue of an unconscious person, you can break this rule provided doing so does not exceed the weight limit of the ladder.
- Allowing an unstable footing for the ladder. If you have to place the ladder on an unstable surface, stabilize the footing. You may need to dig holes for the ladder feet and/or provide additional means of securing the ladder.
- Standing on the top step of a step ladder. "Do Not Step" is printed on that step. So, what is the point of that step if you can't step on it? It stops your shins from moving forward and off the ladder.
- Using a folded stepladder as an extension ladder. Unless the ladder is designed for this purpose and labeled accordingly, this misuse translates to an unstable ladder that is at much higher risk for slipping from under you than an extension ladder would be.
- Using an extension ladder at too steep or too shallow of an angle. Remember this rule for extension ladders: One foot horizontal for every four feet of vertical.
- Extending the ladder only high enough to reach the destination elevation. Instead, extend it three feet above that point.
- Limit exposure times. For example, work 15 minutes, then warm up for 10 in the truck. Then work 15 more and so on. In severe weather, you will probably finish the job faster this way than bumbling through with stiff fingers and fatigue.

Review and discussion

1. What is nearly always the cause of injuries related to ladders?
2. When is it safe to use an aluminum ladder? *[Note to Presenter: Never. Such a ladder is just one big conductor.]*
3. What are some unsafe ways to raise materials to the place where the work is being done? What are some safe ways to do this?
4. What's wrong with hanging your tool belt on a ladder someone else is using, as long as you let that person know? What's wrong with hanging anything from a ladder you are using?
5. What do we need to know and observe about ladder weight limits, and where can we find the needed information?
6. How many people can be on a ladder at one time?
7. If you need to place a ladder on a gravel surface, what can you do to keep the ladder from slipping?
8. Can you use every step on a step ladder? Why or why not?
9. What is the rule for getting the correct angle with an extension ladder?
10. How high should you extend an extension ladder? Why do you think this distance makes a difference?

Participant's Signature and Date

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