

**ESSENTIAL
STANDARD
no.13**

Portable Access Equipment



KEY MESSAGES

- Only use ladders and stepladders where a risk assessment shows there is no suitable alternative.
- Ladders should only generally be used for access as there are other safer methods. Don't use stepladders for access.
- Only use ladders and stepladders for workplace activities if it can be demonstrated that the user can maintain three points of contact at all times.
- Don't use domestic grade access equipment under any circumstances.



1. Introduction

Using portable access equipment incorrectly has caused many serious incidents. Falls from ladders or steps account for about 14 fatalities and 1200 serious injuries every year. They are a key element of HSE safety campaigns.

Examples of portable access equipment are ladders, stepladders, podium steps, and trestles or bandstands.



2. Risk Assessment for Using Ladders and Stepladders

Consider the following factors when doing a risk assessment:



- Only use ladders or stepladders at a workplace in exceptional circumstances: where a risk assessment shows there is no suitable alternative. In most situations, there are safer alternatives to using ladders or stepladders and these must preferably be used if reasonably practicable



- Risk assessments must cover both the safe means of access to the work place and the work place itself. If you must use a ladder or stepladder, record your decision and justification, taking into account the nature, duration and location of the work



- Managers must only accept a risk assessment and safe system of work that includes using a ladder where it has been clearly demonstrated that there is no reasonable or safer alternative



- Don't use ladders and stepladders if lateral force is required in the task (for example drilling to side of a ladder)



- Only use ladders and stepladders at a place of work if the user can maintain three points of contact at all times



- Anyone climbing up or descending must have both hands free to climb and should not carry materials or tools



- If you have to use ladders or stepladders adjacent to stairwells, balconies, shafts or other fall hazards, you must have additional control measures to prevent people or materials from falling over the normal height guard rail or barrier

Don't use trestles or bandstands for access or as a workplace on any Thames Water site.

2. Pulpit or Podium Steps



A safer alternative to ladders and stepladders is a pulpit or podium steps. When using pulpit/podium steps, any work activities must be carried out from the working platform. Carefully consider the height of the work activity when selecting this type of equipment. A pulpit or podium steps must have:

- A maximum of 8 steps
- A minimum platform size of 400mmx400mm
- Handrails
- Lockable separator bars

3. Ladders

Consider the following factors to ensure people's safety when using ladders:



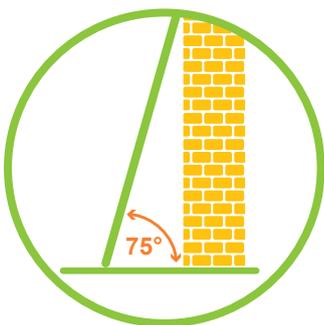
- Never use a domestic grade ladder – they are prohibited



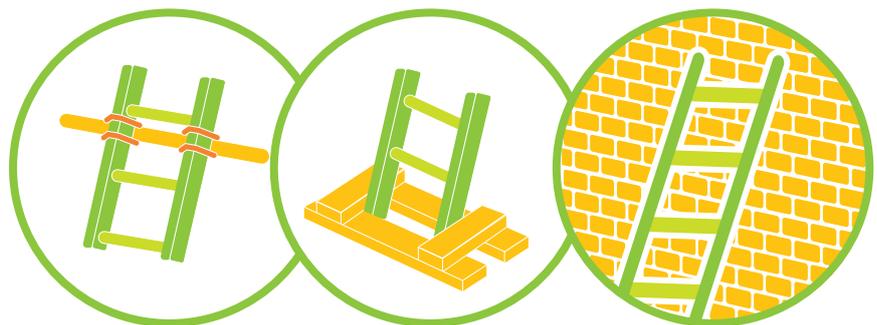
- Never carry tools and materials by hand on ladders. People climbing up or descending must have both hands free to climb



- Wooden pole ladders are preferred to metal ladders (except in 'clean' environments), but ensure they are used the correct way up: the metal supporting rods must be underneath the rungs



- Angle ladders to minimise the risk of slipping outwards: as a rule of thumb this should be '1 out for every 4 up', (approximately 75°)



- Secure ladders using the following hierarchy:
 - Tie both stiles at the top
 - Use a stability device (designed to fit the particular ladder in use)
 - Wedge the ladder (e.g. against a wall)
 - Footing the ladder

4. Stepladders

Remember that all domestic grade stepladders are prohibited at all workplaces. You can use stepladders that have the following characteristics:

- No more than 8 working steps in height, except in special circumstances
- A notice is affixed clearly stating that the top 3 steps should not be used, preferably with these top steps clearly identified
- Constructed from composite materials or metal

To keep people safe when using stepladders, ensure:



- The user does not need to work in a position where they need to over reach or work in a manner which could impose a lateral load to the ladder. Consider using additional stabilisation methods if lateral stability is an issue



- Use suitable barriers or other means of isolation if ladder use is exposed to passing traffic or pedestrian



- Use a composite stepladder in energised areas or when carrying out commissioning activities where there is risk of electric shock

5. Inspection and Maintenance

Secure portable access equipment when not in use to ensure they are not removed and used for unauthorised purposes.



Visually inspect portable access equipment before using it to ensure it is free from damage. Remove damaged ladders immediately and render them unserviceable for any further use.



Make sure that all equipment prior to use is inspected and has a regular, formal inspection regime in place, either as an integral part of a scaffold inspection or as a stand-alone process. Keep careful records of these inspections.



All ladders inspected should be suitably identified and tagged and must be removed immediately from use where the inspection date is found to have expired.