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Guidance On the Safe Use Of Ladders and Stepladders

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Revision Record

Issue	Date	Reason for Review
Draft 1	Dec 2023	New document for consultation

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1.0 Purpose of the Guidance

This guidance document is designed to provide comprehensive information and instructions on the safe use of ladders and stepladders in accordance with the United Kingdom health and safety legislation.

The purpose is to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals who may be involved in or affected by the use of ladders and stepladders in various workplace settings.

2.0 Scope of Guidance

This guidance applies to all employees, contractors, and individuals who may use ladders and stepladders in the course of their work activities. It covers a broad range of industries and sectors where the use of these access equipment is prevalent. The guidance encompasses both portable and fixed ladders, including stepladders.

3.0 Definitions / Acronyms

Term	Definition
Ladders	Portable devices with rungs or steps for ascending or descending.
Stepladders	Self-supporting portable devices with flat steps or rungs fixed to a hinged back.
Competent Person	An individual with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to assess and manage the risks associated with ladder and stepladder use.
Risk Assessment	A systematic process to identify, evaluate, and control potential risks.
Fall Arrest System	Equipment designed to stop a fall from a height and prevent or reduce injury.

4.0 Legal Framework

This guidance aligns with the following UK health and safety legislation:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Work at Height Regulations 2005
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

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Compliance with these regulations is mandatory, and failure to adhere to the requirements may result in legal consequences. It is essential for employers and individuals to familiarize themselves with the relevant legislation and ensure full compliance.

5.0 Responsibilities

- Employers must ensure that work at height is properly planned, supervised, and carried out safely.
- Employees are responsible for using ladders and stepladders in accordance with training and guidance provided.
- Competent persons should conduct regular risk assessments and ensure that suitable control measures are in place.
- Regular maintenance and inspections of ladders and stepladders should be carried out to ensure their continued safety.

6.0 Choice of Equipment

The choice of equipment should take into account the hierarchy of controls:

- firstly to avoid work at height where possible;
- then to prevent falls from height; and, failing that,
- to reduce the consequences of a fall.

Where work at height is necessary you need to justify whether a ladder or stepladder is the most suitable access equipment compared to other access equipment options. You do this by using risk assessment and the hierarchy of controls.

The choice of equipment will be determined by assessing;

- the task to be undertaken (e.g. height and equipment needed to do the job),
- the site conditions and location,
- the extent and duration of the work,
- the frequency of access required,
- risks associated with the task, and,
- the number of people required to do the job.

7.0 Safe Use Guidelines

Ladders have not been banned from the workplace. The key message is that ladders should only be used for light, low risk work of short duration at lower levels. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommend Class 1 “Industrial” or BS EN 131 compliant ladders or stepladders for use at work. Class 3 or domestic type stepladders should not be used in the workplace.

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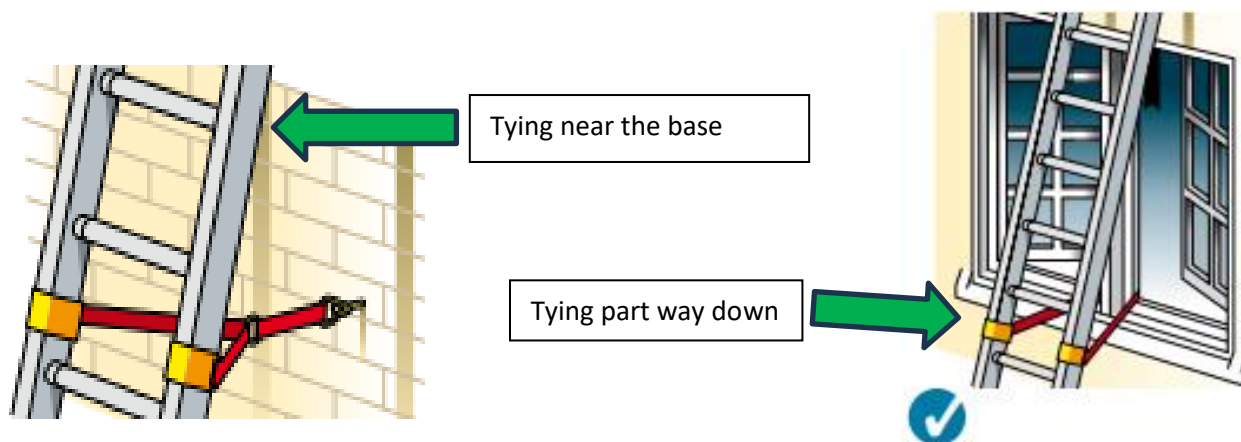
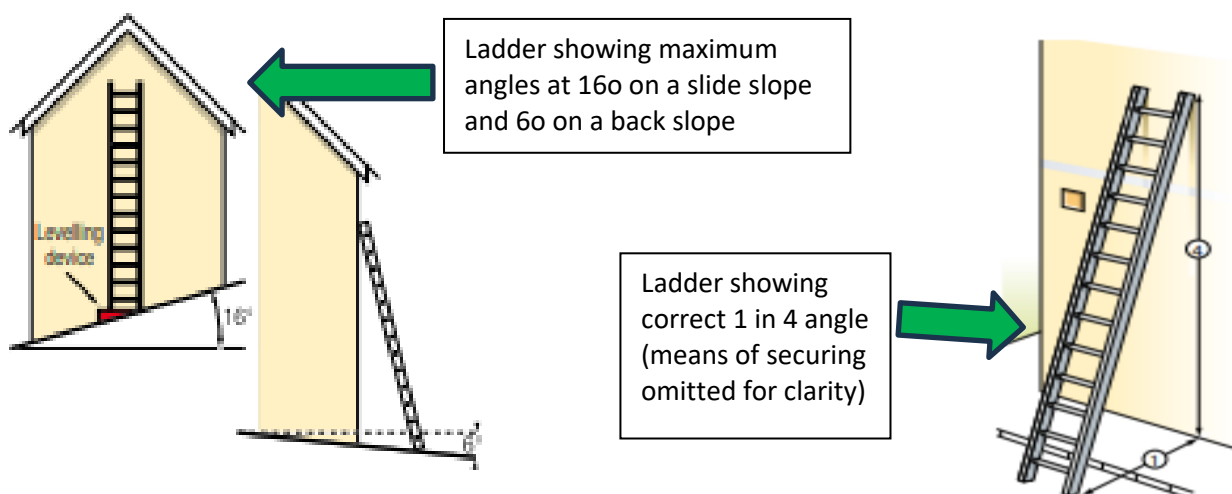
The Work at Height Regulations 2005 requires a risk assessment to be carried out to identify and assess any work at height that is undertaken as part of work activities. This will ensure that ladders are used appropriately, and to identify any precautions that are needed.

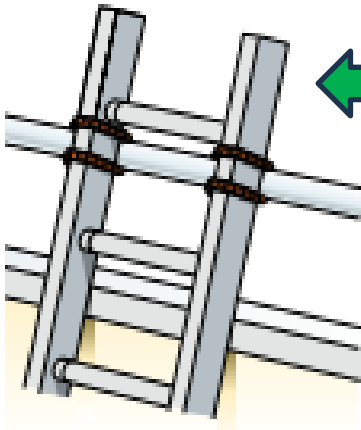
Before use, you must

- a. Establish the ladder / stepladder is in a safe condition, should have no visible defects
- b. Do a daily pre-use check (include ladder feet) checking for defects or damage.
- c. Ladders and stepladders should be maintained and stored in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
- d. It is recommended that formal checks are made on the condition of stepladders every 6 months. Records of the checks should be maintained.
- e. Ladders should be labelled to show that they have been checked, by whom and the date of the next check.
- f. Select the right ladder or stepladder for the task. Always use a non-conductive ladder or steps for any necessary live electrical work;
- g. Ensure the ground over the ladder or stepladder should be a firm, hard, level, clean and non-slip surface. Ladders and stepladders must not be positioned on moveable objects, such as pallets, bricks, tower scaffolds, excavator buckets, vans or mobile elevating work platforms.
- h. Don't work within 6 m horizontally of any overhead power lines, unless the line owner has made them dead or protected with temporary insulation. If this is a regular activity, find out if the lines can be moved
- i. Don't rest ladders against weak upper surfaces (eg glazing or plastic gutters). Alternatively, you can use effective spreader bars or effective stand-offs
- j. Do not exceed the maximum load capacity of the ladder or stepladder.
- k. Maintain three points of contact when ascending or descending.
- l. Use tools belts and materials pouches to while working or to avoid carrying items when climbing up or down.
- m. Do not overreach, make sure your belt buckle (navel) stays within the stiles and keep both feet on the same rung or step throughout the task. Reposition the ladder or step ladder instead.
- n. Secure ladders by tying to a suitable point to prevent movement.
- o. Use any locking devices to keep the stepladders open.
- p. Ensure there is space to fully open the stepladders.
- q. Ladders and stepladders should be used for short duration work (maximum 30 minutes).
- r. Ensure ladders and stepladders are fitted with anti-slip feet.
- s. Avoid working in adverse weather conditions.
- t. Care should be taken when closing telescopic ladders so as not to trap fingers.
- u. Wear robust, sensible footwear (e.g. safety shoes / boots or trainers). Shoes should not have the soles hanging off, have high heels, have long or dangling laces, or slippery contaminants on them.
- v. Be fit certain. Some medical conditions or use of medication, alcohol or drug abuse could stop people from using ladders.
- w. Not extend or move the ladder or step ladder while standing on the rungs or base.

7.1 Leaning ladders in-use

- Maximum safe ground side slope - 16 degrees (level the rungs with a suitable device).
- Maximum safe ground back slope - 6 degrees (level with a suitable device).
- Have a strong upper resting point (not plastic guttering).
- Ladder angle 75 degrees – 1 in 4 rule (1 unit out for 4 units up).
- Always grip the ladder when climbing.
- Do not overreach –
- Do not work off the top three rungs – this provides a handhold.
- Maintain three points of contact with the ladder (minimum of both feet and one hand).
- Do not leave ladders unattended.
- Warning signs should be displayed in public areas and protection from traffic is essential.
- Personal tools and equipment should be secured at all times when working on, or going up or down a ladder, (e.g. use tool belts or carriers).





Ladder tied at top stiles
(correct for working on,
not for access)

Access ladders should
be tied and extend at
least 1 m above the
landing point to
provide a secure
handhold



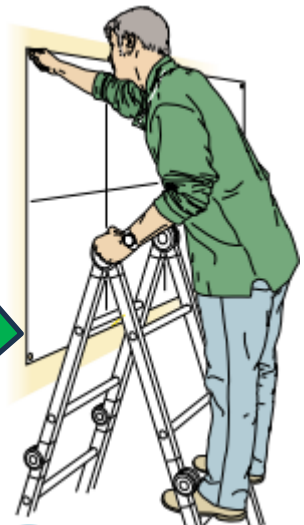
7.2 Stepladders in use

- Do not work off the top two steps for swing-back/double sided stepladders) unless you have a safe handhold on the steps.
- Avoid side-on working. Use with the steps facing the work activity.



Leave at least two clear
rungs. Don't work any
higher up this type of
stepladder

Leave at least three clear
steps. Don't work any
higher up this type of
stepladder



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8.0 Training and Competency

- All personnel using ladders and stepladders should receive proper training and be competent or work under the supervision of a competent person if undergoing training.
- Training should cover the safe use, inspection, and storage of ladders.
- Competency assessments should be conducted regularly. Competency can be demonstrated through a combination of training, practical and theoretical knowledge, and experience.

Training should be appropriate for the task, and this includes knowing:

- how to assess the risks of using a ladder for a particular task;
- when it is right to use a ladder (and when it is not);
- which type of ladder to use and how to use it.
- how to tie a ladder or step ladder correctly.

9.0 Inspection of Ladders and Stepladders

The Health and Safety Executive has determined that a third of all reported fall-from- height incidents involve ladders and stepladders. A significant portion of these incidents involve ladders which are in poor condition. Often defects in ladders go unnoticed or are not remedied because people do not know what to look for or feel that the defects are not serious enough to warrant replacement of the ladder. Because falls from ladders often result in serious injuries, any defects which affect the stability or integrity of a ladder should result in the ladder being taken out of use. Defective ladders should be replaced rather than being repaired.

Ladders should be inspected to ensure that they are in a safe condition. They should be inspected

By the user each time before they are used

By someone carrying out a formal inspection at frequency of every 6 to 12 months, dependant on the frequency of use of the ladder (records should be kept of these formal inspections).

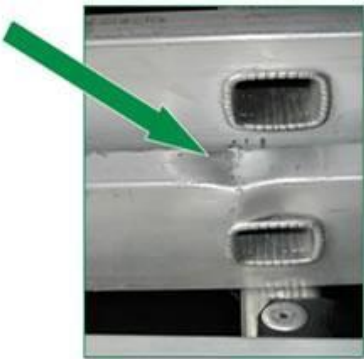
Experience in the University has shown that, in the absence of arrangements for formally inspecting ladders, ladders can develop defects which go unnoticed and make the ladders unsafe for use. We have seen accidents involving defective ladders which have resulted in serious injuries. (An accident resulted in a member of staff breaking a bone in her arm and saw a contractor falling when a rung on a ladder broke.)

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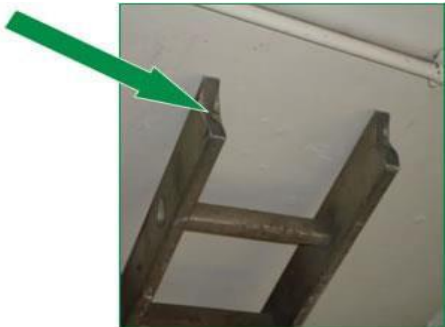
9.1 Visual Guidance for the inspection of Ladders and Stepladder

9.1.1 Visual Guidance for Inspecting Leaning Ladders

Do not use the ladder if the stiles (uprights) are bent or split as the ladder could collapse.



Do not use if the feet are missing, worn or damaged as the ladder could slip.



Do not use the ladder if rungs are bent, missing or loose as the ladder could be unstable.



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9.1.2 Visual Guidance for Inspecting Stepladders

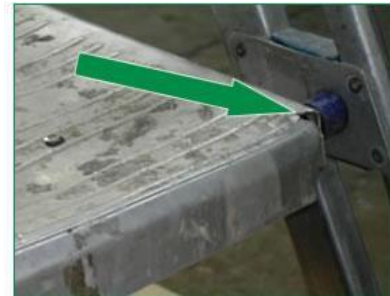
Do not use the stepladder if locking bars are bent or the fixings are worn or damaged as the ladder could collapse



Do not use the stepladder if feet are missing, worn or damaged as the ladder could slip.



Do not use the stepladder if the platform is split or buckled as the stepladder could become unstable or collapse.
Also check the steps/treads are not contaminated, as they could be slippery.



Do not use the stepladder if the fixings are loose as they could collapse.



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Do not use the stepladder if stiles are bent or damaged as the ladder could buckle or collapse.



10.0 Inspection Record Keeping

The records of inspection of ladders can be kept in any convenient form. As a minimum the record should

- identify the ladder,
- give the date of the inspection
- the name and signature of the person carrying out the inspection.

Ladders can be identified either by numbering them or, if there are only a few ladders, by describing them. Records of inspection could be attached to the ladder (e.g. by use of a label stuck onto the ladder), if they are not going to be damaged while the ladder is in use. A University ladder/stepladder inspection checklist (HS-SF-025) and a University ladder/stepladder pre-use checklist (HS-SF-026) that can be used have been developed.

For Schools and Departments with multiple ladders and stepladders, the University ladder/stepladder register HS-SF-027 should be used to keep a record of the number, type/class and location of the ladders/stepladders owned. It is best practice to attach a tag to each item which includes an id number, date of inspection and indication whether or not the ladder/stepladder is fit for use.

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11.0 Emergency Procedures

- In case of an emergency or fall, an effective rescue plan should be in place as identified in the risk assessment.
- Emergency services and first aid should be readily accessible.

12.0 Reporting and Recording

Near misses, incidents, and defects should be reported promptly using the University's accident reporting and recording system.

13.0 Review and Revision

This guidance document will be subject to periodic review and revision as necessary to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

This guidance is intended to provide a framework for the safe use of ladders and stepladders, but it does not replace the need for specific risk assessments and control measures in individual workplaces. Employers and competent persons must assess the specific risks associated with ladder and stepladder use in their unique contexts.

14.0 References

Document Number	Document Name
HSE INDG402.	“Safe use of ladders and stepladders – an employers’ guide”
HSE INDG401	The Work at Height Regulations 2005: A brief guide Leaflet HSE Books 2005