



Don't take a false step with ladder safety

Before you climb that ladder to do your spring cleaning, take a few moments to review some safety tips from Underwriters Laboratories. A little review now might keep you from becoming one of the 220,000 people each year who visit emergency rooms because of ladder accidents.

The first "step" to using any ladder safely is to read the instructions included in the manufacturer's use and care booklet, according to John Drengenberg, Consumer Affairs manager at UL. Manufacturers' instructions contain guidelines that can help consumers use ladders more safely and effectively and also contain important guidelines for weight and height limits.

"Consumers should choose the proper ladder for the intended task. For example, if the ladder will be used near electrical sources, consumers should use a wood or fiberglass ladder to reduce the possibility of electrical shock," says Drengenberg.

Another crucial "step" is to always inspect the ladder before stepping on the first rung, Drengenberg adds. "Make sure the ladder has been well maintained, that the rungs are clean and all parts are intact -- never climb on a slippery or shaky ladder."

Setting up the ladder correctly may help prevent falls. "When planting the base of any ladder, place all feet on a firm, level surface, not on rocks or boards. Spreaders, the devices that hold the front and back sections of a stepladder in an open position, should be completely open and locked before any weight is placed on the ladder. If using an extension ladder, don't place the ladder at too extreme an angle. Remember, different ladders have different safety considerations," Drengenberg advises.

Finally, UL recommends that consumers follow several precautions to help prevent ladder accidents:

- Always use a ladder that is long enough for the task at hand. A great number of ladder accidents are the result of using a ladder that is too short.
- Don't carry equipment while climbing a ladder. Invest in a tool belt or have someone hand the equipment to you.
- Face the ladder when climbing up and down; keep your body centered between both side rails.
- While up on the ladder, don't overextend your reach. Make sure you keep your weight evenly distributed.
- Never move a ladder while standing on it. Always make sure people and equipment are off the ladder before moving or closing it.
- Never stand on a ladder's bucket shelf. Read and follow the warning stickers for highest standing levels.

For more consumer safety information, visit <http://www.ul.com/regulators/pubedu.html>

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