

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Avoiding Strains, Blows, and Pinches When Handling Portable Ladders

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart X]

Stories about workers who suffer life-altering injuries while using a portable ladder always grab our attention. But there are many other ladder users who will also suffer injuries that, while relatively less severe, can still result in a lot of pain misery, as well as lost time at work and unwanted medical expenses. So here are a few things to keep in the front of our minds while working with portable ladders to help us avoid nagging injuries to ourselves and others.

- **Avoid Back Injuries.** Ask someone to help any time you are setting up, taking down, or transporting a heavy ladder. This is especially true if your ladder is a long one, as the ladder's weight combined with its long length actually multiplies by several times the amount of torque applied to your back when handling the ladder alone.
- **Work Smarter – Not Harder.** When setting up a long extension ladder to lean against a wall or similar structure, lay the ladder flat on the ground with the feet against the base of the wall. Then lift up the other end and “walk” the ladder up until it is flat against the wall in an upright position. Then reach down to a lower rung with one hand while holding the ladder steady on a higher rung with your other hand, and slowly pull the bottom of the ladder away from the wall until it is leaning against the wall at the proper angle.
- **Avoid Those Pinch Points.** Avoid placing your hands and fingers near any pinch point when opening up or folding closed your portable step ladder. This is especially a hazard at the points where the spreaders on step ladders are attached and hinged near the top part of the ladder, as they act like a scissor closing as the ladder is folded shut.
- **Smashed Fingers Hurt Too!** Avoid placing your fingers in-between the front and back sections of a step ladder when folding the ladder closed, or when carrying it from one place to another. Many ladder users suffer smashed fingers when the two sections come together – often with surprising speed and force!
- **Exercise Extra Caution at Blind Corners and Doorways** – When carrying your portable ladder around the work site, slow down when approaching corners, doorways, and similar areas so you do not run into someone walking or standing on the other side. You might even want to shout out a verbal warning as you approach such areas. Also, lower the leading end of the ladder slightly so in the event you do accidentally make contact with someone coming around a corner, at least the ladder won't strike their face or head.

These are not the only potential hazards than cause us to suffer injuries. But they are some of the most common ones that we can try and avoid. So use extra caution while handling portable ladders; slow down and think about these tips when setting up, taking down, and transporting your portable ladder. The injury you avoid may be your own.

Can anyone come up with any additional examples of potential injury-causing accidents that can occur when using portable ladders? Thank you for your participation, and please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending today's training session.