

FIVE-MINUTE SAFETY TALK

Ladder Safety

Why can't "SAFETY" be a magic word like "Barramundi?" The Barramundi has certainly captured the interest of fishing enthusiasts. Safety has had a tough time getting attention.

Many times we approach ladders by leaping carelessly on to the ladder, disregarding its placement or condition.

Certainly a very important factor in ladder safety is the correct placement of the ladder. The safest angle at which a straight ladder can be placed can easily be determined. The distance from the base of the ladder to the wall should be equal to one-fourth the distance from the base to the point of support. (Repeat this point. Speaker also may wish to use a straight ladder to demonstrate.)

Once you've placed your ladder at the correct angle, the safest way to climb it is to face the ladder. The same thing applies when descending. Hang on with both hands when ascending and descending and use at least one hand to hold on when working from a ladder.

One of the most common unsafe practices on a ladder is overreaching, particularly if you're painting or working on some project which progressively gets farther from your ladder. We're inclined to tell ourselves, "It's only an inch or two more—I'll just reach a little further—"and the first thing we know, we've had a fast trip back to earth.

The only safe way to handle a situation like this is to descend the ladder and move it to the correct spot. Besides, you'll welcome the opportunity to stretch your legs.

Incidentally, falls are responsible for 17.4 percent of all fatal work injuries (USA), so taking time to be safe is important.

There should be non-skid shoes on all ladders. A firm, level surface on which the ladder is placed is important, too. Placing a ladder on a box or another object to increase its height quickly increases your chances of having an accident. Always use the correct size ladder.

Unfortunately, you can't escape back-seat drivers, even when you're on a ladder. However, there should be only one person on a ladder at a time. If there is any lengthy conversation or instructions that have to be directed to the person on the ladder, the climber should descend and carry out the discussion on the ground.

Approximately 900mm of a straight ladder should extend above the topmost point to be reached, and never stand above the third rung from the top. To secure the ladder, tie it off at both the top and bottom. On a stepladder, never

stand above the third highest step, and don't attempt to use a stepladder as a straight ladder.

Common sense plays an important part in ladder safety, just as it does in about anything you undertake. There are things like keeping grease and other foreign substances off ladder rungs and steps; taking one step at a time when climbing; inspecting ladders before using them—they're all things we should do just through common safety sense.

Another thing to remember is that we can't control the actions of others while we're on a ladder. But there are certain things we can do to protect ourselves from their unsafe acts. For instance, if you're working from a ladder near a doorway, lock or barricade the door so someone in a big hurry won't bump your ladder and dump you to the floor.

Metal ladders are used quite often and are fine. But when you're using one, make sure that it doesn't come near electric wires or equipment. The same goes for the person using a metal ladder - stay away from electric wires or equipment.

Statistics can be rather cold and impersonal, at least until you become a statistic yourself. But anyway, 19 percent of all permanent disabilities and 21 percent of all temporary total disabilities on the job are caused by falls (USA), many of them from ladders. We all have a pretty good idea of what can happen in a ladder accident, so let's do everything possible to prevent one.