

Toolbox Talk Training: Portable Ladders – Types and Working Loads

Not all portable ladders are the same. Portable ladders come in different styles, materials, lengths, and weight capacities, and each type is designed for specific tasks and working conditions. Understanding these differences is important for selecting the right ladder and using it safely. Today, we will review the two main categories of portable ladders and explain how to identify their load ratings.

Portable ladders are generally divided into two categories:

- **Self-supporting ladders** – These ladders can stand on their own when properly opened and positioned. Examples include standard step ladders, platform ladders, articulated ladders, and certain specialty ladders such as two-way ladders.
- **Non-self-supporting ladders** – These ladders must lean against a stable structure or surface for support. Examples include straight ladders and extension ladders.

Each ladder type is designed for different applications, and we will discuss their proper uses in future toolbox talks. In addition to ladder type, every portable ladder is assigned a maximum working load or duty rating by the manufacturer. This information is typically displayed on a label attached to the ladder side rail. The duty rating identifies the maximum amount of weight the ladder is designed to safely support.

Here are the common portable ladder duty ratings:

- **Type III – Light Duty**

Maximum load capacity: 200 pounds

Typically intended for light household or occasional use. Some jurisdictions may prohibit the use of Type III ladders on job sites.

- **Type II – Medium Duty**

Maximum load capacity: 225 pounds

Commonly used for light commercial work, painting, office maintenance, and similar tasks.

- **Type I – Heavy Duty**

Maximum load capacity: 250 pounds

Frequently used in industrial settings, maintenance work, utilities, and construction.

- **Type IA – Extra Heavy Duty**

Maximum load capacity: 300 pounds

Designed for demanding industrial and construction environments.

- **Type IAA – Special Duty**

Maximum load capacity: 375 pounds

Intended for the heaviest-duty industrial, utility, and construction applications.

Remember that the ladder's load rating includes more than just the worker's body weight. It must also account for clothing, personal protective equipment, tools, materials, and anything else being carried or placed on the ladder. Before using any ladder, always verify that its duty rating is sufficient for the total combined weight it will support.

Does anyone have questions about portable ladder categories, ladder types, or duty ratings? Thank you for attending today's toolbox talk. Please remember to sign the training certification form before leaving so you receive credit for attending today's training session.

