

Toolbox Talk Training: Portable Ladders – Performing Pre-use Inspections

Safety standards require portable ladders to be inspected before their first use during each work shift. The purpose of these inspections is to identify any visible damage or defects that could cause the ladder to fail and potentially injure the user. Ladders must also be re-inspected after any incident that could have caused damage, such as being dropped, knocked over, or struck by equipment or materials.

When inspecting a portable ladder, look for the following common hazards and defects. Keep in mind that some inspection items apply only to certain ladder types or materials, while others apply to all ladders:

- Side rails that are bent, cracked, split, dented, splintered, or broken
- Rungs, steps, cleats, or braces that are bent, cracked, loose, splintered, or damaged
- Missing or loose screws, rivets, bolts, or other fasteners
- Damaged or loose ladder components such as hinges, spreaders, or braces
- Spreader bars that do not fully lock into place on step ladders
- Rusted or corroded ladder parts
- Heat or burn damage, including blistering or charring
- Missing, worn, or damaged non-slip feet or safety pads
- Damaged or malfunctioning wheels, casters, or locking devices on mobile ladders
- Worn, frayed, damaged, or broken ropes and pulleys on extension ladders
- Oily, greasy, wet, or otherwise slippery rungs, steps, or side rails
- Unauthorized repairs, modifications, or makeshift fixes

If any structural damage or unsafe condition is found during the inspection. Requires the ladder to be immediately removed from service. The ladder must be tagged with a warning such as “Dangerous – Do Not Use” or similar wording. It may only be returned to service after being properly repaired by a qualified person and restored to its original safe condition. If the ladder cannot be repaired safely, it must be discarded and replaced.

Many ladder defects can be prevented through proper handling, transportation, and storage. Store ladders in secure locations where they cannot fall, become damaged, or be struck by vehicles, tools, or materials. Use caution when transporting ladders to avoid unnecessary wear or damage.

Does anyone have questions or additional comments regarding portable ladder inspection requirements? Thank you for attending today’s toolbox talk. Please remember to sign the training certification form before leaving so you receive credit for today’s training session.

