Before the first ladder climb

A short ladder safety toolbox talk for today's task

Decide whether this ladder, in this condition and location, suits the work. Follow the manufacturer's instructions, employer procedures and the rules for your operation.

1. Choose the ladder and work method

Read the labels. Check intended use, length and load rating. Include the worker, tools, equipment and materials in the load. Do not exceed the rating or use boxes or barrels to gain height. If the task needs overreaching or an unstable setup, stop and have the supervisor choose a safer method.

2. Inspect and remove defects from service

Check rails, steps or rungs, feet, connections, locks and spreaders. Check for slippery material. Identify a defective ladder, remove it from service and report it. Do not improvise a repair. General industry: inspect before initial use each shift and more often as needed. Construction: a competent person inspects periodically and after an event that could affect safe use.

3. Check the location

Use stable, level support; keep access clear and protect against displacement by traffic or work. Check electrical hazards before moving or raising the ladder. Do not use metal ladders near power lines or exposed energized equipment. A nonconductive ladder is not permission to enter an electrical danger area.

4. Set up and climb as designed

Do not use a stepladder leaned or partly closed, or stand on its top or top step. Review extension-ladder angle, access and securing requirements before work. Face the ladder, keep three points of contact while climbing and keep tools out of your hands. Do not carry a load that could upset balance. Do not shift a ladder with a person or equipment on it; climb down and reposition instead of overreaching.

Ask the crew

- Why is this ladder right for the task? What defect means do not use?
- What could move the ladder or expose it to electricity here?
- How will tools reach the work area without occupying our hands while climbing?

Make it specific to this job

Task / ladder / location: _____

Inspection / action needed before use: _____

Person responsible / recheck: _____

Sources and limits

General industry: OSHA 1910.23. Construction: OSHA 1926.1053. Practical guidance: OSHA Portable Ladder Safety QuickCard. Check the standard that applies to the work. Links are clickable. Reviewed November 3, 2026.

General safety information only. This aid does not replace required ladder training, a site-specific assessment, employer procedures or manufacturer instructions. Attendance is not proof of competence.

Specialist talks and PDFs: toolboxtalk.com/basic-ladder-safety-toolbox-talk/