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## Ladder safety matters

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### Summary

- Ladders are dangerous. They are associated with more deaths and injuries than any other household product.
  - In recent years there has been a significant increase in ladder fall injuries in the home, contrary to the reducing trend of ladder falls in the workplace.
  - Men aged 60 years and older are most likely to suffer serious injuries from a ladder fall.
  - Most people know ladders are dangerous, but occasionally still take a risk or shortcut.
  - When using a ladder, make safety matter.
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### What's the issue with ladders and safety?

Major trauma resulting from domestic ladder falls in Victoria doubled between 2002 and 2013.

In Victoria alone, there is an average of 1330 emergency department presentations as a result of a domestic ladder fall and approximately seven men die as a result of falling from a ladder at home each year.

Nationally, there has also been an increase in injuries associated with ladder falls, especially among men aged 60 years or older.

The Department of Health & Human Services and **Consumer Affairs Victoria** have joined a national campaign, which aims to reduce serious injury from domestic ladder falls by encouraging older men to:

- practice safe ladder use (such as taking the time to set up the ladder correctly, and not using the ladder on wet or uneven ground or over-reaching while on the ladder)
- consider the consequences of unsafe ladder use (which may include serious injuries, loss of independence, or even death).

### Ladder safety by the numbers

- Hospital admissions from domestic ladder falls are likely to be under-reported. Research undertaken in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales indicates that on average over 4,000 people in these states are hospitalised each year as a result of a domestic ladder fall.
- Of these hospitalisations, approximately three-quarters are men.
- Approximately three in five people who are hospitalised after a ladder fall suffer bone fractures. The next most common injuries are open wounds and head injuries, including concussion.
- Admissions to intensive care units due to serious head, chest and spinal injuries caused by ladder falls are increasing.
- In addition to injuries, many people die from falling off a ladder in Australia each year. The majority of these deaths resulted from ladder use while undertaking home maintenance duties and most ladder fall deaths occurred in males aged 75–84 years.

### Ladder safety tips

#### Make sure your ladder is safe and right for the job

- Use a standards-approved ladder (Australian Standard AS/NZS 1892).
  - Read the manufacturer's advice and follow safety warnings.
  - Check that your ladder is in good working order (for example, ensure it is free of rust, has non-slip safety
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feet, and that safety locks and braces are in place).

- Make sure the ladder is rated for the weight you need it to carry (including your weight, the weight of tools and supplies you are using, and any objects placed on the ladder).
- Make sure that the ladder you choose is right for the task.

#### **Work in the right conditions**

- Only work up a ladder in suitable weather conditions (for example, a hot day may cause you to get dizzy and lose balance, a wet day may cause you or the ladder to slip, high winds could cause the ladder to fall).
- Make sure your ladder is not placed in front of outward-opening doors or windows.

#### **Take the time to set up your ladder safely**

- Place the ladder on dry, firm and level ground.
- Always ensure the ladder is locked firmly into place before use.
- Make sure the ladder is the right height for the job.
- If you're working on an extension ladder, ensure it reaches about a metre above the surface it rests against and secure it at the top.

#### **Work safely up the ladder**

- Wear non-slip footwear.
- Work within your arm's reach and avoid leaning out – it is much safer to get down and readjust the ladder.
- Maintain three points of contact at all times while on the ladder. Use two hands when climbing. When using a tool, make sure both feet and your other hand are secure on the ladder.
- Only climb as far as the second step from the top of a step ladder or the third step or rung from the top of an extension ladder.

#### **Know your limits**

- Work within your limits and make sure another person is at home while you are working with a ladder, in case you need help.
- Have another person around to hold the ladder to prevent it from slipping.
- If you are affected by medication, have a medical condition that could affect your strength or balance, or if you just don't feel well, leave the task for another day or ask someone to help.
- If you are 65 years or older (or 50 years or older and of Aboriginal descent) and you need assistance with basic maintenance around your home, contact **My Aged Care** by calling 1800 200 422.

#### **Where to get help**

- **My Aged Care**
- **Product Safety Australia**
- Better Health Channel - **Falls services for older people**
- The Ladder Safety Matters brochure provides a practical guide for safe ladder use in the home environment. Copies of the brochure can be obtained using the **online order form**.

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Department of Health and Human Services

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