

Portable Ladders: Pre-Use Inspections

Start Safe, Stay Safe

Before using a portable ladder on any shift, OSHA requires that you inspect it. Why? Because even small damage can lead to serious accidents if a ladder fails while in use. You should also inspect the ladder again **if it's been dropped, knocked over, or struck by equipment** — any incident that might have caused hidden damage.



Worker inspecting ladder before use

Here's what to look for during your ladder inspection. Note that not all of these apply to every ladder — some are specific to step ladders, extension ladders, or mobile ladders, and some depend on the material (wood, metal, etc.).

What to Check During a Pre-Use Ladder Inspection

- Side Rails** – Look for cracks, splits, bends, dents, or splinters. Any damage to the rails means the ladder is unsafe.
- Rungs, Steps, Cleats, Braces** – These should be straight, solid, and unbroken. Watch for cracks, bends, or loose components.
- Fasteners** – Screws, rivets, and bolts must be tight and secure. If anything's missing or loose, the ladder isn't safe to use.
- Spreaders, Hinges, and Braces** – Make sure they're in good condition and lock properly. Broken or loose hardware is a no-go.
- Locking Spreaders** – Step ladders must lock securely when opened. If not, don't use it.
- Corrosion or Rust** – Especially on metal ladders, rust or corrosion weakens the structure and must be addressed.
- Heat Damage** – Burns, scorch marks, or blisters could be signs of structural weakness caused by excessive heat.
- Non-Skid Feet** – Check that all rubber feet or safety pads are present and in good shape. Missing or worn feet can cause the ladder to slip.
- Mobile Ladder Wheels & Stoppers** – Make sure wheels and brakes work properly. A rolling ladder is a serious hazard.
- Pull Ropes and Pulleys (on extension ladders)** – Ropes should not be frayed, worn, or broken. Pulleys should move freely.
- Cleanliness** – Steps and rails should be dry and free of oil, grease, or anything else that could cause a slip.
- DIY Repairs or Modifications** – Homemade fixes are not allowed. Only factory repairs by qualified personnel are acceptable.

If You Find Damage

If your inspection spots **any damage**:

1. **Tag the ladder immediately** with a clear warning like "**Danger – Do Not Use.**"
2. **Remove it from service** so no one else can use it.
3. **Get it repaired** by a qualified person — or, if it can't be fixed, **destroy and replace it.**

Preventing Damage

Most ladder damage can be avoided with a few simple habits:

- Store ladders **securely** and **out of traffic areas** where they won't get knocked over or run into.
- Be careful when **loading, unloading, or transporting** ladders — rough handling leads to hidden cracks and bends.

Final Word:

A good inspection before you use a ladder can prevent serious injury. If it doesn't look or feel right, don't take the risk. Tag it, report it, and use another one.



SAFETY TRAINING SIGN IN SHEET

TRAINING TITLE			
DATE & TIME		LOCATION	
COMPANY		TRAINER	