Working at height - safe use of ladders

1. Choice of equipment – will be determined by

- The task - height & equipment to be used
- The site conditions & location
- The extent and duration of the work
- The frequency of access required
- Risks associated with the task
- Number of people required.

For some jobs mobile elevating work platforms or other work platforms are better options. Ladders should be used for light, low hazard work of short duration at lower levels.

2. Common hazards associated with ladder use

- Falls stepping off and on lower rungs
- Ladder slipping sideways at upper resting point due to overreaching or instability.
- Ladder slipping outwards at the bottom due to unsuitable ground conditions or incorrect angle.
- Ladder failure
- Electric shock due to overhead electrical hazards
- Injury when handling ladders
- Injury to others from falling tools
- Working from too short a ladder.

3. Stability of ladders

- Use on hard, flat, level surface where possible
- Stabilise by tying to a suitable point to prevent movement where possible, or use proprietary stability devices.
- Ensure ladders are fitted with anti-slip feet
- Place ladders at correct angle (75 degrees or 1m out for every 4 m up).
- Rest the top against a suitable firm surface (not plastic gutters, glass or infill panels).
- Ensure ladder rungs and stiles are clean and not slippery
- Ladder accessories may improve stability and should be used where appropriate, e.g. stile extensions for stability on slopes.

4. Is the ladder long enough?

- Overall length is not the same as "usable" length - allow 1 meter of ladder above the highest rung you use.
- Avoid standing on the top 3 rungs.
- Current best practice is to limit ladder length to a maximum of 9 meters.

5. Maintenance

- Ladders are "work equipment" and subject to the requirements of the *Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998*
- Ladders should be individually identified and listed on an equipment register which records: - the make / type / duty / weight / class rating and date first put into use.
- Ladders should be inspected regularly (at least 3 monthly) and condition recorded.
- Procedures should be in place for dealing with defects, which will include repairs or removal from service
- Ladders should be checked daily before use for defects – e.g. cracked, bent or warped stiles; cracked, bent or missing rungs; loose defective or missing feet, tie rods or brackets; corrosion of fittings, etc.

6. Ladder safety tips

- Ladders should not be left unattended
- Warning signs should be displayed in public areas and protection from traffic is essential
- Personal tools and equipment should be secured at all times when going up and down ladders, i.e. use tools belts or carriers
- Never use a painted ladders – the paint may be hiding defects.
- Check for overhead electricity lines before putting up the ladder.
- Get help to carry heavy ladders.
- Footing will not prevent sideways slip at top of ladders.
- Use barriers to prevent people walking beneath them.
- Ensure all users are aware of the points in this document.

7. Stepladder safety (as above plus)

- Anti-slip feet should be present, in good repair and clean.
- Check they are sturdy and stable prior to use - do not use if unstable.
- Only use when they are the most suitable means of access.
- Avoid using on packaging, soft or sloping ground, or slippery surfaces.
- Use with the steps facing the work activity to avoid imposing a side loading, unless no side load or to improve access to the task.