Church Guidance Note

# Ladders



Ladders and stepladders are commonly used in churches. There is no ban on this and they offer a practical option for low-risk, short-duration tasks.

However, ladders can pose a significant risk of injury if they are not used properly. There can be a temptation to use them even if they are not quite right for the job or to just get things done quickly. Therefore, it is essential that basic safety precautions are taken when ladders are used.

This note deals with pole, extension and portable ladders including stepladders. It does not include roof ladders, where additional precautions are usually required.

Fixed ladders are also common in many churches and may need to meet a number of specific safety requirements. You will need to check these, should you have one. For example, you may have to provide safety hoops or a permanently fixed fall arrest system depending on your circumstances.

## Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured, you may need to show that you have met your duty of care.

In addition to this, you may have to comply with other duties set out in the Work at Height Regulations. This will be where you are an employer or have control of work completed by others. If you control the work, you will only need to comply with the requirements to the extent of your control.

## Risk Advice Line

Should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk-related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact us through our Risk Advice Line on

**0345 600 7531**
(Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays)

and one of our in-house risk professionals will be able to assist.

Alternatively, you can email us at

**risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com**

and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

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For ladders, the Regulations require that:

- If you are an employer, they are only used where a risk assessment shows that this is appropriate
- Surfaces supporting them are safe (i.e. stable, firm etc.)
- They are positioned to ensure their stability
- Portable ladders are prevented from slipping (by adequately tying-off the stiles at the upper end; using anti-slip or other stability devices etc.)
- They extend sufficiently above any landing place, unless there is provision for an adequate hand-hold
- Interlocking or extension ladders are only used if their sections can be prevented from moving relative to each other while in use
- Mobile ladders are prevented from moving before being stepped on
- Where a ladder (or run of ladders) extends a vertical distance of 9m or more above its base, then sufficient safe landing areas or rest platforms are provided at suitable intervals
- They are used in such a way as to ensure they provide a secure handhold/support at all times for users and that a safe handhold can be maintained when carrying a load (although there are additional considerations in this respect when using stepladders).

Other additional requirements might also apply (e.g. where work equipment – such as a ladder – is used, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations would also apply) in some circumstances.

Even if you are not an employer, you must still make sure that any equipment (including any ladder) you provide for use by others is safe.

## Hazards to look out for

Typical hazards include:

- Ladders and stepladders being used when safer options would be more appropriate (e.g. completing the work from ground level, using a scaffold tower)
- Ladders and stepladders that are unsuitable (e.g. too short) or defective (e.g. missing or broken rungs, damaged stiles)
- Using equipment incorrectly (e.g. not in accordance with manufacturer's instructions, design or load capabilities; standing on the top rung, stretching or leaning too far)
- Failing to have appropriate weighting at the foot of the ladder or not having it tied securely at the top
- Inadequate information or training for those required to use them
- Ladders and stepladders poorly stored, particularly if unauthorised users have access to them
- Unauthorised alterations to equipment (e.g. ladders should not be painted as this can hide defects)
- Inadequate lighting
- Contact with overhead electricity lines
- Adverse weather making work at height unsafe (e.g. high winds, snow and ice)*.

*This list is not exhaustive.

## Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- Avoiding the need for work at height in the first place (say , completing it from ground level)
- Ensuring that work is properly planned in advance, taking into account any safety precautions that are needed
- Using existing places at height (e.g. galleries) to work from where these are suitable (i.e. they have safe access, protected edges etc.)
- Choosing ladders and stepladders that meet recognised standards (e.g. BS 1129, BS 2037 or BS EN 131)
- Making sure that ladders are suitable for the job (e.g. long enough)
- Providing information and training on the safe use of ladders
- Using ladders made of non-conductive material near to overhead electricity lines
- Making sure no work at height is carried out when there are adverse weather conditions
- Making sure access equipment is inspected for wear or damage before use and periodically thereafter and is properly maintained*.

*This list is not exhaustive.



## Making a start

| Action | Guidance |
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| **1. Identify circumstances where work at height may require the use of ladders and any fixed ladders you may have for access between floors.** | If you are an employer, you will need to complete formal risk assessments.<br><br>These should help you identify circumstances where work at height may require the use of ladders or where there are any fixed ladders for access between floors. |
| **2. Where you use portable ladders or stepladders, check their use is justified.**<br><br>**Make a note of the reasons for this.** | You will need to do this if you are an employer. The risk assessments you complete should help you with this.<br><br>Where practicable, it is better to avoid working at height (e.g. completing the work from ground level using extendable tools). This is not always possible in a church and ladders or stepladders might be more practical. You may need to show that this is acceptable. Normally, this would be because of the low risk associated with the work and the short duration of their use or there are existing features in your church that cannot be altered e.g. the presence of fixed pews.<br><br>As a guide, 'short duration' means having to stay up the ladder for less than 30 minutes at a time. This is not the only factor you will need to consider, as ladders must only be used where they will be level, stable and properly secured.<br><br>Fixed ladders used for access between floors should only be used where a conventional staircase cannot be accommodated and their use is considered safe. You will need to think about those that will be carrying loads whilst using the ladder. |
| **3. Check the precautions you have taken are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed.**<br><br>**Make a note of the precautions in place and/or any additional ones that might be required.**<br><br>**Also, note who will be responsible for taking them.** | Again, where you have completed formal risk assessments, these will do this for you.<br><br>They will also provide a useful record of the steps you have taken to identify any necessary precautions.<br><br>Typical precautions are set out above. You can use this list to help decide if any further precautions are necessary. These will vary depending on your particular circumstances.<br><br>For portable ladders, precautions will include proper:<br><br>• **Selection** – any ladder must be the right type for the job and suitable (i.e. strong, robust and long enough) for its intended use. It should comply with relevant standards (usually BS 2037 or BS EN 131). Where it is not new, only equipment which has been adequately inspected and properly maintained should be used.<br><br>• **Use** – any ladder needs to be in a safe condition, having no visible defects. This should involve checking them before use and regularly thereafter. Users will also need to take precautions, including those necessary to prevent overreaching or overloading through to ensuring that the equipment is properly positioned, footed and/or secured. Ladders and associated equipment need to be adequately stored when not in use. |

## Making a start

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| | • **Maintenance** – ladders must be properly maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Unauthorised alterations of the equipment should be prohibited with defects being reported and repaired promptly.<br><br>Stepladders are suitable for small jobs of short duration where it is not possible to rest a ladder against a wall or other support. They should only be used for minor maintenance at low levels. The stepladder should have an 'A' frame with a small working platform at the top which can be used to hold tools and materials. The platform should never be used to stand on. There must be a mechanism to prevent the legs from spreading out and a safety catch to prevent the joint opening. They must be placed on firm, level ground. The height of the steps should not exceed three times the width of the base. |
| **4. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain in place for as long as is necessary.**<br><br>**Make a note of any checks or inspections you make to ensure these precautions are being taken or equipment remains safe.** | Where portable ladders are used, you may also need other precautions to guard against falling materials or objects; prevent unauthorised access to work areas; provide adequate lighting; ensure safety around overhead services and/or equipment etc.<br><br>Ensure that pre-use checks are completed by those using the ladder. They may need information and training on how to do this. Also ensure that regular, detailed visual inspections of the equipment are carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions – these must be completed by a competent person and recorded by them. |
| **5. Ensure that ladders will not be used when weather conditions make this unsafe.** | |
| **6. Ensure that employees (and volunteers in these circumstances) know how to use the ladders safely.**<br><br>**Make a note of any information or training that is provided to individuals.** | For most churches, tasks are usually low-risk. Here, making sure employees and volunteers receive simple instruction on how to use the equipment safely would be sufficient. In many cases, an understanding of the user instructions affixed to the equipment would be enough.<br><br>All persons required to inspect, repair and maintain equipment should be provided with appropriate training and information. |

## Making a start

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| **7. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for using ladders.**<br><br>**Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.**<br><br>**Retain records of the notes you have made in the steps outlined above.** | If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it.<br><br>In the event of a claim, paperwork will be important. So, where ladders are used, you should retain the records mentioned. Where you prepare other documentation, you should keep this as well. This could include **information gathered at the scene of the accident** (e.g. sketches/photographs; witnesses' statements); investigation documents (e.g. accident book); or **specific health and safety documents** (e.g. risk assessments; records of maintenance, inspections and other checks; records of information and training provided; policy etc.). |

## Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at **www.ecclesiastical.com/healthandsafety**

Further guidance and resources are also available at: **www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm** in particular the leaflet 'Safe use of ladders and stepladders: A brief guide, INDG455' this is available at **www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg455.pdf**

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

## Need to report an incident involving an injury?

If an incident occurs that may result in a claim for injury, please retain any accident investigation records, e.g. accident book entry, photos etc. and contact our specialist claims team on **0345 603 8381** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm) for advice. Where you have received correspondence about a claim being made against you, it is important that you notify us immediately and email a copy to our experts on **casualtyclaims@ecclesiastical.com**

## Policy cover queries

For queries about your policy cover, call our specialist church team on **0345 777 3322** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at **churches@ecclesiastical.com**.

Alternatively, please visit **www.ecclesiastical.com/church**.

This guidance is provided for information purposes and is general and educational in nature. It should not be used as a substitute for taking professional advice on specific issues and should not be taken as providing legal advice on any of the topics addressed.

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