

**ESSENTIAL
STANDARD
no.13**

Portable Access Equipment



KEY REQUIREMENTS

- Ladders must only be used for low risk work activities lasting no more than 30 minutes
- Only ladders rated for industrial use & complying with EN 131 can be used
- Pre-use checks to be undertaken and recorded
- Always maintain 3 points of contact
- Tools to be stored in a caddy or held in a tool belt
- All ladders to have a unique reference number and have a ladder tag

1. Introduction

In 2024/5 8% of all incidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain were falls from height (over 50,00 incidents) Falls from height incidents are often the result of defective access equipment, the misuse of the equipment or that the equipment has been incorrectly selected for a task.

Examples of portable access equipment are ladders, stepladder, podium steps, and trestles or band stands



2. Risk Assessment

Consider the following factors when assessing the risk and need to use a ladder or stepladder:

- Risk assessments must cover both the safe means of access to the workplace and the workplace itself. If you must use a ladder or stepladder, record your decision and justification, taking into account the nature, duration, and location of the work.
- Managers must only accept a risk assessment and safe system of work that includes using a ladder where it has been clearly demonstrated that there is no reasonable or safer alternative.
- Don't use ladders and stepladders if lateral force is required in the task (for example drilling to side of a ladder)
- Only use ladders and stepladders at a place of work if the user can always maintain three points of contact.
- Anyone climbing up or descending must have both hands free to climb and should not carry materials or tools.
- If you must use ladders or stepladders adjacent to stairwells, balconies, shafts or other fall hazards, you must have additional control measures to prevent people or materials from falling over the normal height guard rail or barrier.

Don't use trestles or bandstands for access or as a workplace on any Thames Water site.

3. Pulpit or Podium Steps

Consider using pulpit or podium steps as a safer alternative to ladders and stepladders.

When using pulpit/podium steps, any work activities must be carried out from the working platform.

Carefully consider the height of the work activity when selecting this type of equipment and ensure they have:

- A maximum of 8 steps
- Minimum platform size of 400mm x 400mm
- Handrails
- Self-closing gate
- Stabilisers



4. Ladders

Consider the following factors to ensure people's safety when using ladders:

- Only use ladders complying to EN 131 designated as Industrial Grade. The use of domestic grade ladders is prohibited.
- Undertake pre-use checks and record these and ensure the ladder has a unique reference number and has an in-date ladder tag.
- Be mindful of overhead obstructions and electrical services that can hamper working off the ladder or could cause electrical shock.
- To prevent toppling over, ladders must be securely footed and tied off at the top and when tying off, the stiles should be used, not the rungs.
- Ladders should be placed on level ground & not to be used if it is raining, snowing or in high winds.
- Angle the ladder 1 out for every 4 up (approx. 75 deg.).
- Maintain 3 points of contact
- Store tools and equipment in a tool bag, tool caddy or tool belt and never carry tools in your hand when ascending or descending the ladder



5. Stepladders

Consider the following factors to ensure people's safety when using stepladders:

- Only use ladders complying to EN 131 designated as Industrial Grade. The use of domestic grade stepladders is prohibited.
- Undertake pre-use checks and record these and ensure the stepladder has a unique reference number and has an in-date ladder tag.
- It should be no more than 8 working steps in height, except in special circumstances.
- To not work from the top 3 steps (unless the stepladder has an elevated handrail 1.1m high above the topmost working step and avoid the need to over-reach
- Not to work from the ladder in such a way that a lateral force is applied and where this cannot be avoided, ensure the stepladder is stabilised to prevent such movement.
- If used in pedestrian or vehicle routes, ensure suitable sturdy barriers or other suitable measures are employed to designate the work area.
- Use composite step ladders where there is a potential risk of a person sustaining an electrical shock from energised areas and overhead services.
- Maintain 3 points of contact
- Store tools and equipment in a tool bag, tool caddy or tool belt and never carry tools in your hand when ascending or descending the ladder

6. Inspection & Maintenance

Consider the following factors to ensure people's safety when using ladders, stepladders & podiums:

- The user of the equipment to perform a pre-use check to ensure that the equipment is free from defects such as damaged stiles, missing or damaged rungs or missing or defective safety features such as stabilisers etc.
- The equipment should have a unique reference number and an in-date inspection tag.
- Undertake pre-use checks and record these and ensure the stepladder has a unique reference number and has an in-date ladder tag.
- Keep a record of the equipment, checks that have been undertaken and record the issuing of the equipment to employees.
- The equipment should be taken out of service every 3 months to have a thorough inspection and any equipment with defects must be quarantined, disposed of and replaced.