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## Safety Bulletin: April 2017

### Let's Talk About Safety

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Agenda: Proper Ladder Use



Ladder incidents cause thousands of individuals each year to be admitted to emergency rooms across the country, or worse, result in hundreds of deaths. Ladders represent one of the most basic methods for working at heights, and are a common and crucial part of many workers' daily experience within the glass industry. Sadly, because we use them so frequently, it is very likely that workers can become complacent with safety methods and put themselves at risk for serious injury or death.

When dealing with portable ladders, the most common types workers will encounter are the extension (straight) ladder, and the step (A-frame) ladder. Each of these types have specific purposes, and should not be used interchangeably. The primary difference in their function is that extension ladders are supported (e.g. by a wall) while step ladders are self-supporting and must be fully extended to use. Whenever we use ladders, it is important to remember that we select the type of ladder which is appropriate for the task.

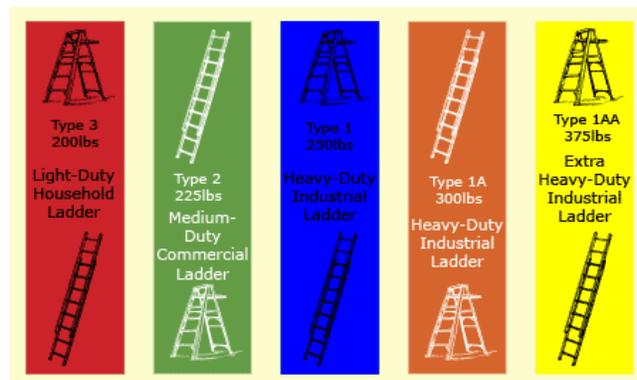
The next issue we face is the size of ladder used. Often, workers will grab a ladder, and if it is not long enough for the need, they will simply "make it work" – usually by engaging in unsafe acts to reach. Remember, ladders are specifically designed to provide as much strength and stability as possible, but that is often very limited. Extension ladders used to access different levels must extend at least 3 feet past the top surface and be secured, and step ladders should never have anyone standing on top two steps.

Set-up is another common issue, as improper set-up is a major factor in falls from ladders. All ladders require a firm, level surface, and should not be leveled with other materials, such as boards, bricks, or blocks. The surface should be able to support the intended load of the ladder, worker, tools, and equipment without failure. A ladder set up on mud, for example, is likely to shift and tilt with the load, making it highly unstable. Extension

ladders should be set up at an angle which gives the maximum support and stability, where the base is 1 foot out for every 4 feet of vertical elevation to the point of support. Step ladders must be fully extended with spreader bars locked open. Climbing even a partially-closed step ladder is likely to result in a fall.

A final issue is worker behavior when using a ladder. One of the most common cause of falls is failure to maintain 3-points of contact while climbing up or down. This means that a worker is either using two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand at any given moment. When workers carry items up in their hands, even if they are placing wrists or elbows upon the rungs while climbing, it is very unlikely they will be able to catch themselves if they slip or lose balance; their hand, instead, clamping down on the item carried in the hand and not on the ladder.

Over-reaching and attempts to reposition a ladder while still on it are other common unsafe acts. Many workers may not wish to climb down a ladder and safely reposition it, especially if the move would be a short distance. Instead, they often lean dramatically to one side of the ladder, or even attempt to “hop” it sideways to shift it closer to their goal. When the center of balance of a worker, usually coinciding with where the belt-buckle would be, extends past the side rails of a ladder, gravity will often pull the ladder down, and the worker along with it. Similarly, “hopping” or “walking” a ladder while still on it can dangerously shift the balance of the ladder, or undermine stable footing, which will also usually cause a fall.



One final item to be aware of is ensuring the ladder you use has the rated capacity to support the employee, tools, and equipment supported on it, as well as being in good enough condition to be worthy of that rating. Broken rungs, cracked side-rails, missing hardware, or accumulated mud or grease on rungs can make a ladder unsafe to use. Ensure you inspect a ladder each time before use.

Ladders are one of the most versatile tools available for working at heights, and can be found at almost every worksite, but if we fail to select and use ladders properly, they can be the source of injuries, losses, and deaths.

1. What safety problems have you observed on our jobs?

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2. What job related injuries have we had since our last meeting?

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3. Today's Topic:

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