

Mobile Ladder & Stepstool Safety Talk

We've all done it: climbed a stepstool quickly to grab that one box from the top shelf before the next truck comes in. It feels routine. It feels harmless. But most serious ladder injuries happen during 'routine' tasks, not complicated ones.

Accessing high shelving, retrieving overstock inventory, and performing merchandising adjustments require routine use of stepstools and rolling platform ladders. Improper equipment selection, failure to lock casters, overreaching, or using makeshift climbing devices significantly increases fall risk.

Hazards Associated with Mobile Ladders and Stepstools

- **Falls from elevation:** Standing on the top cap, climbing beyond manufacturer-designated steps, or leaning outside the side rails can result in loss of balance.
- **Tip-over and unintended movement:** Rolling ladders can shift if wheel locks are not fully engaged or if the floor surface is uneven, sloped, or contaminated with debris or liquids.
- **Overloading and structural failure:** Exceeding the ladder's ANSI duty rating (Type I, IA, IAA, etc.), including worker weight plus carried merchandise, can lead to mechanical failure.
- **Overreaching and lateral instability:** Reaching sideways rather than repositioning the ladder moves the worker's center of gravity outside the ladder footprint.
- **Housekeeping and aisle congestion:** Shrink wrap, pallets, carton debris, and narrow aisle spacing increase trip hazards and reduce stable ladder placement.

Checks and Assessments

Frequent inspection supports safe ladder use and early identification of defects. Typical checks include:

- Verifying that rails, steps, and platforms are free of cracks, bends, or corrosion.
- Confirming that locking mechanisms and spring-loaded casters function properly.
- Ensuring non-slip feet and treads are intact and clean.
- Checking for missing fasteners, damaged welds, or loose handrails.
- Confirming manufacturer labels and duty ratings are legible.

Defective ladders must be removed from service immediately and tagged to prevent unintended use.

Stability and Surface Hazards

Retail stockrooms often include polished concrete floors, transitions between surfaces, and high pedestrian traffic. Important controls include:

- Positioning ladders only on clean, level, dry surfaces
- Fully engaging wheel locks before climbing
- Keeping aisles clear of carts, pallet jacks, and stocking equipment
- Repositioning the ladder rather than leaning or shifting weight outside the rails
- Never moving or “walking” a rolling ladder while occupied

Struck-By and Pinch Hazards

Mobile ladders can contact overhead sprinklers, racking systems, lighting, or coworkers during movement. Safe practices include:

- Surveying overhead clearances before positioning
- Communicating ladder movement in congested areas
- Establishing awareness zones during peak stocking periods
- Prohibiting more than one worker on a ladder unless designed for multiple users

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Slip-resistant footwear to reduce loss-of-traction incidents
- Gloves when handling cartons to improve grip stability
- Close-fitting clothing to prevent snagging on racking
- Head protection where overhead hazards are present per site policy

Summary

Mobile ladder and stepstool safety in retail environments depends on proper equipment selection, routine inspection, stable positioning, and disciplined climbing practices. Most ladder injuries aren’t caused by equipment failure; they’re caused by one small decision: “I’ll just do it quickly.” The safest stockrooms are built by people who pause before that decision.

Discussion points:

1. *What stockroom conditions most frequently compromise ladder stability in your location?*
2. *When should a rolling platform ladder be selected instead of a standard stepstool?*