

Safety Short

Public Works, Taking Steps for Safety

During the winter season Public Works crews are busy loading, inspecting and repairing sander/hoppers mounted in the bodies of dump trucks. Frequently these are accessed by means of a ladder or stepladder during inclement weather and often on snow- or ice-covered public works lots. Serious falls have been reported to Risk Management Services of Public Works employees falling 10 feet to a concrete floor while doing a repair on a sander/hopper unit.

Insufficient fall protection is number 1 of the 10 most frequently cited violations by OSHA, and ladder safety violations is ranked number 7. If a ladder is used, it should be secured to the truck, and if possible, fall protection then secured to the ladder. Even if fall protection is not possible, some basic tips may help prevent a fall.

- If using a ladder to access a sander/hopper in a dump body, choose the proper ladder for the job. Stepladders should never be leaned against a truck body and used like a regular ladder. If a ladder is leaned against the truck body, it should extend at least three feet above the top support point.
- Before using the ladder, inspect it. If there are missing, broken or defective rungs, cleats, or other faulty equipment, don't use it! The ladder should be taken out of service and tagged as "Dangerous- Out of Service". Remember the manufacturer of the ladder must approve all repairs to ladders.
- While this may be difficult in winter conditions, place the ladder on a level, non-slip surface or secure it by tying the base to stakes or have a fellow employee foot the ladder to prevent it from moving. Do not place the ladder on boxes or other unstable bases to gain additional height.
- Keep the rungs free of oils, snow, ice or other debris.



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- Remember the 4-to-1 rule. Divide the number of rungs to the top support point of the ladder by 4 to get the number of feet the base of the ladder should be away from the bottom of the truck or the wall. For example, if it is 8 rungs to the top support point, then the ladder should be placed two feet away from the bottom of the truck. (8 rungs \div 4 = 2 feet)
- Watch for overhead power lines! Always look up prior to positioning, raising or moving a ladder.
- If possible, secure the ladder to the truck or anchor the ladder at the top. Do not use fall protection secured to the ladder unless the ladder can be secured first.
- Face the ladder while climbing.
- Keep your weight centered between the rails.
- The hands should grip the rungs of the ladder - not the rails.
- Feet should be placed on the rungs, so the front edge of the heel is against the rung.
- Do not lean out beyond the rails to work. Keep your belt buckle between the side rails of the ladder.
- Do not stand on the top two rungs or steps of a ladder.
- Don't carry objects while climbing a ladder. Use a tool belt, or hoist items up with a rope.
- Maintain three-point contact. Both feet and one hand, or both hands and one foot should always be in contact with the ladder.

Taking a little time to follow these basic steps could prevent an injury and keep key personnel productive during the busy winter season. Participants of the MMA Risk Management programs can access the online Ladder and Scaffolding Safety course at the MMA Risk Management Services Online University. See the Online University link. For more information, please contact your MMA Risk Management Services Loss Control Consultant.