

Injury Prevention

Ladder Safety

In August 2007, a South Porcupine man received attention from media because he lost his life when he fell off a ladder. The Porcupine Health Unit would like to remind everyone that “[f]alls are the leading cause of unintentional home injury fatalities, and therefore, extra caution is required when using a ladder” (SmartRisk, 2004).

Northern Ontario has the highest rate of emergency department visits related to falls from ladders, according to Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) (2006). More than half of these falls are occurring around the home. In November, many people in Northern Ontario are cleaning their eaves troughs, hanging Christmas lights and doing other home maintenance chores requiring them to use ladders. Not surprisingly, November is the month when the most injuries occur involving falls from ladders.

Each day, in Ontario, 23 people are visiting Emergency Departments because they have fallen off a ladder. The most common injury sustained from this is fractures to the lower or upper limbs (CIHI, 2007). The Porcupine Health Unit encourages everyone to utilize the following safety measures prior to and while using a ladder:

Select an appropriate, CSA approved, ladder for the task. Check for defective equipment.

Before using a ladder outdoors, choose a location that is well away from all power lines. Coming in contact with live wires can be fatal.

Place ladders where access is not obstructed. For example, stay clear of unlocked doors.

Place the ladder on level ground, where it will be free from loose or slippery substances, and open it completely, making sure all locks are engaged.

Always face the ladder when climbing and wear slip-resistant shoes.

Make sure rungs are dry before using the ladder.

Ensure hands and feet are free of oil, grease, or other substances before climbing a ladder.

Stand at or below the highest safe standing level on a ladder. For a stepladder, the safe standing level is the second rung from the top, and for an extension ladder, it's the fourth rung from the top.

Move the ladder as necessary to avoid overreaching. If your belt buckle crosses either side of the ladder you are reaching too far.

The distance from the feet of an extension ladder to the wall should be no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the height on the wall it is reaching.

(Safety measures produced by SmartRisk, 2004)

Save you and your family from grief this fall, as you prepare your home and yard for winter, by practicing safety measures to reduce the risk of injury or death. The Porcupine Health Unit celebrates any and all lives saved through injury prevention.

