



## Portable Ladders

In recent months the Club has been notified of a number of crew injury claims resulting from the use of portable ladders. Although ladders are in common use both ashore and on ships, investigations into the causes of these accidents show the risks associated with their use at sea are often not fully appreciated.

Some injuries have occurred because the ladders have been badly maintained or damaged; others because the ladder was set at the wrong angle, or on an unstable surface, or was not properly secured at the base or top. Vessel movement in rough weather can also be a contributory factor and crew using ladders whilst working alone was a feature of a number of cases.

### Case 1

A member of the crew was painting on the forecastle on an unsecured portable ladder propped against the mast. The crew member was wearing a safety harness though this was secured to the ladder itself. As the crew member adjusted his position to sit on one of the ladder rungs the base slipped outwards away from the mast. The ladder fell to the deck with the crew member still in a sitting position. He suffered a spinal injury that required him to be repatriated and undergo surgery.

### Case 2

A Reefer Engineer was using an unsecured portable ladder to access the machinery of a container stowed in an upper tier on deck. Another crew member secured the ladder and then left the scene. A short while later the Reefer Engineer, who was not wearing a safety harness, was seen to be stretching to reach an access cover. The cover opened unexpectedly on to his arm and caused him to lose his balance. He fell backwards off the ladder and on to the main deck; a distance of several metres, suffering severe injuries.

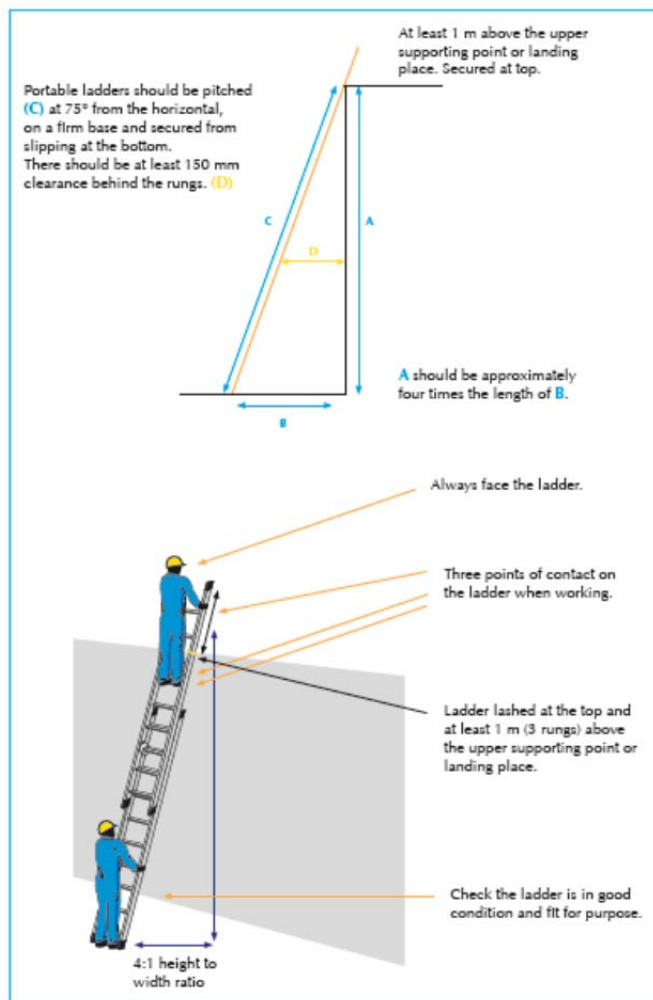
### Case 3

Two crew members were painting aloft using a portable ladder. Although a risk assessment had been carried out prior to starting the work and the ladder was secured, the crew member aloft was not using a safety harness in contravention of the operator's Safety Management

System and the risk assessment. To enable work to progress the assisting crew member needed to fetch tools and while doing so witnessed the crew member aloft stretch his arm to an area that was difficult to reach area and slip off the ladder. The resulting fall caused spinal injuries and permanent paralysis of the lower body.

### Further Information

Section 17.3 of the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (2016 Edition) provides detailed advice on safe practices when using portable ladders: ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/578413/CSWPMS\\_2016\\_colated\\_for\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/578413/CSWPMS_2016_colated_for_web_final.pdf))





To summarise the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers:

## DO

- Carry out a risk assessment and toolbox talk before starting the job.
- Review your company's Safety Management System for guidance on working at height.
- Check the ladder is clean and in good condition before using it. If damaged do not use it.
- Check how much load the ladder can take.
- Consider how the ladder can be secured at the top and bottom before starting.
- Check the place where the ladder will stand to ensure the base is stable, dry and clear of tools and equipment that may cause slipping or shifting of the ladder.
- Consider the prevailing weather conditions and how these may affect the vessel's motion.
- Make sure the ladder is pitched between 60° and 75° from the horizontal.
- Provide a clearance of at least 150mm behind the rungs.
- Make sure the ladder is properly secured against slipping or moving sideways at the base and the top by using a lashing.
- Wear a safety harness which is connected to a strong place on the vessel's structure above the ladder.
- Always face the ladder and keep three points in contact with it, i.e., two feet and one hand or two hands and one foot.
- Make sure enough lighting is available to illuminate the ladder and work place.
- Use wooden or fibreglass ladder when electrical hazards may be present.

## DO NOT

- Use a ladder if the working height exceeds 9 metres.
- Carry tools or equipment up a ladder.
- Work on a ladder alone. Make sure someone else is there to assist.
- Use a portable ladder for more than 30 minutes.
- Stand on the top three rungs of the ladder.
- Exceed the maximum load of the ladder.
- Overreach on a ladder to work – move the ladder to a closer position.
- Use portable ladders as a horizontal walkway or platform, nor to access over the vessel's side, hatch coaming or accommodation.
- Place a ladder outside an unlocked or unguarded door where it can be knocked over if someone opens the door.

For further information on this or other Loss Prevention topics please contact the Loss Prevention Department, Steamship Insurance Management Services Ltd.

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