



Fall from ladder while working at height

It has been reported that a linesman has recently been injured as a result of a fall from a ladder. The incident is currently under investigation, but it is understood that the linesman received a minor electrical shock from a service that had been connected with crossed polarity. This caused the linesman to fall, and as he was working unattached, he fell to the ground and suffered serious spinal injuries.



The unfortunate incident acts as a timely reminder to refresh our procedures for working at height from a ladder. Ladders are still an acceptable method for working at height as long as some basic safe guards are followed.

Firstly, a site specific risk assessment should be completed before any work at height activity is carried out, with consideration given to method of work. If ladders are to be used, additional things to consider are:

1. Are the ground conditions firm enough, will the ladder sink into the ground; if it is suspected this may be the case a board may be needed to help spread the load of the ladder
2. Is the ground level, a maximum of 16 degrees of side slope and 6 degrees of back slope is the maximum that is permitted
3. When erecting a ladder make considerations for the potential for the ladder to be struck by, or dislodged by a vehicle, pedestrian, opening door or window. Barriers or a guard may be required for the safety of the person on the ladder.
4. Ladders must be erected at the correct angle of 75 degrees, follow the simple 1 in 4 rule (1 unit out for every 4 units up)
5. Ensure the floor surface is clean and not contaminated by oil, moss, or any loose material so that the feet of the ladder can adequately grip.
6. Ladders should only be used for short duration work (one position for a maximum of 30 minutes). If the work is likely to take longer than this an alternative means of access must be considered
7. Ladders should only be planned for "light work" involving the worker using equipment of around 10kg or less. You should avoid holding items when climbing a ladder – use a tool belt or sash line.
8. When working on a ladder you must maintain three points of contact (hands and feet) at any one point in time. Where this cannot be maintained, other measures may be needed to prevent a fall.
9. Never over reach – keep your belt buckle inside the stiles and both feet on the same rung whilst working.
10. Ideally a ladder should be tied off from both stiles to a suitable fixed point. Where this is not practicable an effective ladder stability device should be applied and used. If none of the above can be achieved a competent person should foot the ladder as a last resort. If none of the above methods can be used an alternative means of working should be sought.