

Safe  
Workplaces

# Ladders and Step Stools



Training  
Support Material for Workplace Safety Briefings

Your Statutory Accident Insurance

# Ladders, Stepladders & Step Stools – Identifying and Reducing Risks

Ladders are used every day in many BG ETEM member companies – yet they remain a common source of accidents. Falls typically occur when ladders are used incorrectly, or when they are damaged or unsuitable for the job in hand. Technical faults are less likely to be the cause of accidents nowadays – most falls result from user error or carelessness. The consequences can be life-changing, ranging from serious harm to fatal injuries.

## Using ladders safely: what you need to know

### Never use damaged ladders

Do not use defective ladders. Report any damage to your supervisor.

### Mind how you stand

Leaning sideways can cause the ladder to topple over – especially if a sideways force is applied at the same time. This can happen when drilling, tightening or loosening screws, or pulling on cables. As far as possible, position the ladder directly in front of or beneath the work area, and reposition it whenever necessary.

### Wear suitable footwear

When climbing a ladder, you must wear footwear that provides adequate grip and support. Shoes without heel straps are therefore not appropriate.

### Don't carry heavy or bulky items on the ladder

Make sure you can always hold on with at least one hand when standing on a ladder.

### Ladders are not suitable for some jobs

Do not use ladders for work that requires the use of significant force or that takes a long time. Instead, use more suitable equipment such as scaffolding or mobile elevating work platforms.

## A safe grip requires suitable footwear!



Do not carry out hazardous work in inappropriate footwear.



Safety shoes protect your feet from injury and provide a secure foothold.

# The most common types of ladders

In practice, three main types of ladders are used: stepladders, leaning (or 'straight') ladders, and combination ladders. Each type is suited to different applications and requires specific safety measures.



Make sure that the spreader is fully taut before use.

## Stepladders

### Do not use stepladders incorrectly

Never use a stepladder as a leaning ladder. This poses a significant risk because the base or the top of the ladder could slip, or the hinges may be damaged.

### Set up on firm ground only

Never place the base of the ladder on boxes, bricks, stacked materials, tables or uneven surfaces.

### Only climb stepladders when fully opened

Spreaders (such as straps, chains or cords) stop the two sides from sliding apart. If they are not taut, the legs can suddenly splay out, causing a fall.

### Do not step across from a stepladder onto shelves or similar

Stepping up from a stepladder onto a higher work area or shelving is dangerous and prohibited, as the ladder could easily tip sideways.

### Carry stepladders correctly

The safest way to carry stepladders is in a folded and vertical position, held parallel to your body.



## Leaning ladders

### Always lean a ladder against a secure anchor point

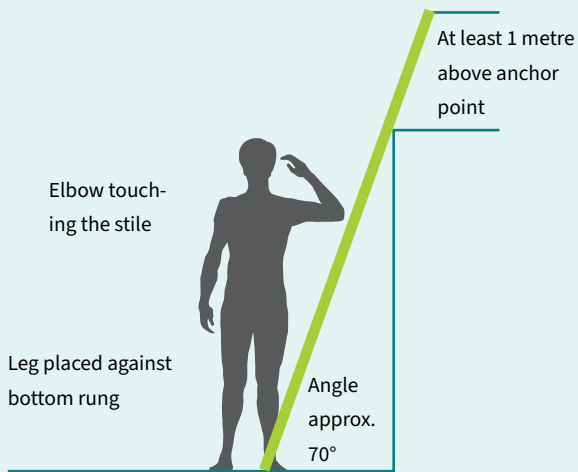
Glass panes, taut wires, vertical poles, unlocked doors and other items that could become unstable are not secure anchor points!

### Set up on firm ground only

Never place the base of the ladder on boxes, bricks, stacked materials, tables or uneven surfaces.

### Do not step off the ladder without something to hold onto

When stepping across onto higher areas such as intermediate platforms or storage areas, some kind of handhold must be available. This could be handrails or the ladder stiles themselves. In the latter case, the ladder must extend at least 1 metre above the point being accessed from the ladder.



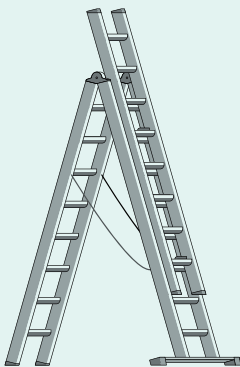
### Only light, short-duration tasks may be carried out from a ladder

Leaning ladders should only be used for performing brief, low-effort tasks. The following conditions must be observed: the standing position on the ladder should be no higher than 5 metres above the surface on which the ladder is positioned; the total weight of tools and materials carried should be a maximum of 10 kilograms.

### Check the angle of leaning ladders

Rung ladders must form an angle of approximately 70° with the surface on which they are placed. This can be checked using the elbow method (see illustration).

## Combination ladders



When using a multi-purpose ladder in “stepladder” or “leaning ladder” mode, follow the usage instructions for the respective ladder type, as well as the following:

### Observe maximum climbing height

For stepladders fitted with an extension section, it is not permitted to climb higher than the fifth rung from the top of the extendable section. The section of ladder extending above the top standing rung is intended solely as a handhold.

### Do not step across from the ladder

When using a combination ladder as a stepladder, do not step up onto higher work areas or shelving, as this can easily cause stepladders to tip sideways.

### Check the hinges

With repeated use, self-locking hinges on combination ladders may fail to engage correctly if contaminated with dirt, rust, or similar substances. After every adjustment, always verify that the hinges are fully locked.



## Step stools

Step stools must be placed on firm, level and non-slip surfaces. Damaged step stools must not be used.



Further guidance on correct usage and safety precautions can be found in our directions for use at [medien.bgetem.de](https://www.medien.bgetem.de)



# Working for you BG ETEM

## Fostering a safe and healthy work environment

BG ETEM is the statutory accident insurance provider for approximately four million people across more than 230,000 member companies.

We help make everyone's workplace as safe as possible. In the event of a workplace accident or occupational disease, we provide medical treatment, rehabilitation and support to help you return to work.

Learn more about us and the services we offer:

➔ [www.bgetem.de](http://www.bgetem.de)

Order no. PU022-18E

Our publications on occupational safety and health are available at

➔ [medien.bgetem.de](http://medien.bgetem.de)

Image credits: Jörg Block for BG ETEM (cover)

New Africa/stock.adobe.com-400895538 (p. 2, top),

sandals: Tubeland/stock.adobe.com-50001435 and safety shoe:

Elten GmbH (p. 2, bottom); Zarges GmbH (p. 3) infografiker.com for BG ETEM (p. 4, centre),

Iryna Petrenko/stock.adobe.com-422168969 (p. 4, bottom)

6 · 0 · 3 – last updated: 12/25 – All rights reserved.  
Printed on paper from sustainably managed forests.

## BG ETEM

**German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the  
Energy, Textile, Electrical and Media Products Sectors**

Gustav-Heinemann-Ufer 130

50968 Cologne, Germany

Phone: +49 221 3778-0

➔ [www.bgetem.de](http://www.bgetem.de)

Follow us on:

