



Curatorial Safety

Museum Ladder Safety

On occasion, museum staff will undoubtedly find it necessary to employ the use of stepstools, stepladders, and similar equipment to access out-of-reach areas. Some projects that might require the use of a ladder include: housekeeping in the museum, collections storage facility, or furnished historic structure; maintenance of lighting systems; hanging/removing window treatments; moving books to/from library shelves; moving museum objects.

The following are a few suggestions for the safe and effective use of ladders in museum areas:

- Always use a stepstool or ladder whenever the job requires it, rather than using a chair, box, or other object. It may involve taking a couple of extra minutes to find a ladder (rather than using the nearby folding chair or wooden box), but your safety is more important than a couple of minutes “saved.” By standing on that chair or box, you could lose your balance, fall, and seriously injure yourself. You could also damage nearby artifacts and historic fabric.
 - Take your time. Never rush. Remember the old adage “haste makes waste.” For our purposes, haste could cause unintended carelessness, and injury to you and/or the resource.
 - Prior to beginning the project, develop a plan for the proper use of your ladder and for safely moving it into and out of the work area.
 - Whenever moving a ladder within a furnished historic structure or anywhere else among museum collections and exhibits, have another individual assist you. If necessary, move furniture or other items out of your way first.
 - Be aware of all possible hazards: overhead power lines, heat sources, slippery floors, obstructions, visitors and staff, etc.
 - Have one or more ladders or stepstools dedicated solely for museum use. This will eliminate searching for the proper ladder whenever you need it. There will also be less of a chance that the ladder could track dirt, grease, etc. into museum areas (as opposed to a ladder that is used for every type of parkwide project).
 - Utilize a nearby closet or similar, easy-to-access but out of the way location where you can store the proper size ladder and/or stepstool that museum staff may require in the immediate vicinity.
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Occasionally, you may need to utilize a ladder to move museum objects. In these instances, it is imperative to seek the assistance of other staff, preferably two other individuals. One person can hold the ladder, one person can be on the ladder, and the third person can hand or receive the object to and from the individual on the ladder.

Various warehouse and industrial supply companies sell rolling ladders with handrails and small wheels (the wheels retract during use). Your local hardware store or home improvement center might also carry or be able to order a rolling ladder for you. Such easy-to-move and use ladders are a good choice for a collections storage facility.

For additional ladder safety information, consult:

Baker, David E. and Rusty Lee *Portable Ladder Safety*, available on the web at <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000801-d000900/d000877/d000877.html>.

Prather, Timothy G. “*Five Rules of Ladder Safety*,” available on the web at <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000701-d000800/d000762/d000762.html>.

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