

Portable Ladder Inspection and Tagging

1.0 Objective & Intent

The objective of this Safe Operating Procedure (SOP) is to establish a standardized, verifiable process for the periodic inspection and colour-coded tagging of all portable ladders used within the cabinet and millwork manufacturing facility. This procedure is intended to mitigate the risk of falls from height, structural failure, and equipment damage caused by defective ladders.

This SOP is mandated by WorkSafeBC Regulations (Part 13: Ladders, Scaffolds, and Temporary Work Platforms) and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (OHSR) 13.2, which requires that all portable ladders be inspected by a competent person before each use and at regular intervals. Failure to comply can result in serious injury, regulatory fines, and operational downtime.

The specific risk this SOP mitigates is the use of structurally compromised ladders—including those with cracked side rails, bent rungs, loose hardware, or missing feet—which can lead to catastrophic collapse and fall injuries. By implementing a mandatory inspection and tagging system, the facility ensures that only safe, serviceable ladders remain in circulation.

2.0 Operational Scope

This procedure applies to all portable ladders used within the cabinet and millwork manufacturing facility, including step ladders, extension ladders, platform ladders, and folding ladders. It covers ladders owned by the company as well as any ladders brought onto the premises by contractors or visitors.

The scope includes all maintenance personnel, production workers, supervisors, and contractors who use or handle portable ladders. The inspection and tagging process is to be performed by a designated competent person, typically a maintenance technician, safety coordinator, or supervisor who has received formal ladder inspection training.

This SOP applies to all areas of the facility, including the main production floor, finishing area, warehouse, shipping/receiving dock, maintenance shop, and mezzanine levels. It does not apply to fixed ladders, rolling ladders, or aerial lifts, which are covered under separate SOPs.

3.0 Hazard Identification & Mandatory PPE

- **Fall from Height:** Using a ladder with cracked side rails, bent rungs, or missing feet can cause sudden collapse, resulting in a fall from height. Always inspect the ladder before each use.
- **Structural Failure:** Overloading a ladder beyond its rated capacity (e.g., using a Type III ladder for heavy materials) can cause rung or rail failure. Verify the ladder's duty rating before use.
- **Slip/Trip Hazard:** Ladders placed on uneven, slippery, or cluttered surfaces can shift or tip. Ensure the ladder is on a stable, level surface and that the area is clear of debris.
- **Electrical Shock:** Using a metal ladder near energized electrical equipment or overhead power lines creates a risk of electrocution. Only use non-conductive fiberglass ladders for electrical work.
- **Pinch Points:** Folding or collapsing ladders can pinch fingers or hands. Keep hands clear of hinge points and locking mechanisms during setup and takedown.
- **CSA-Approved Steel Toed Boots:** Required for all personnel in the inspection area to protect against falling ladders or tools.
- **Safety Glasses:** Required to protect eyes from debris, dust, or splinters during ladder inspection.

- Work Gloves: Cut-resistant gloves recommended when handling ladders with rough or splintered surfaces.
- High-Visibility Vest: Required when inspecting ladders in active traffic areas such as the warehouse or shipping dock.

4.0 Required Safety Equipment & Tools

- Ladder Inspection Checklist (printed or digital): A standardized form listing all inspection points, including side rails, rungs, feet, spreaders, locking mechanisms, and labels.
- Colour-Coded Tags: A set of durable, weather-resistant tags (e.g., green for pass, red for fail) with a unique ID number and space for date and inspector initials.
- Tag Gun or Zip Ties: For securely attaching tags to the ladder side rail.
- Flashlight or Headlamp: For inspecting dark or hard-to-see areas such as the underside of rungs and inside hollow rails.
- Measuring Tape: To verify ladder length and check for bent or twisted components.
- Spirit Level: To check that the ladder sits level on a flat surface.
- Rubber Mallet: For gently tapping rungs and rails to detect loose or delaminated components.
- Lockout/Tagout (LOTO) Kit: Not required for ladder inspection itself, but must be available if the ladder is used near energized equipment.
- First Aid Kit: Must be accessible in the inspection area in case of cuts or splinters.

5.0 Step-by-Step Safety Procedure

1. Notify all affected personnel that a ladder inspection is in progress. Post a temporary sign at the entrance to the inspection area if it is in a high-traffic zone.
2. Don all required PPE: CSA-approved steel-toed boots, safety glasses, cut-resistant gloves, and high-visibility vest. Ensure the inspection area is clean, well-lit, and free of trip hazards.
3. Visually inspect the ladder's side rails for cracks, splits, splinters, or signs of rot (wood ladders) or corrosion (metal ladders). Run a gloved hand along the full length of each rail to feel for hidden defects.
4. Inspect each rung for cracks, bends, or excessive wear. For step ladders, verify that the steps are securely attached and that the anti-slip treads are intact. Use a rubber mallet to gently tap each rung; a dull sound indicates delamination or internal damage.
5. Check all hardware: spreaders, locking mechanisms, hinges, and rivets. Ensure that spreaders lock firmly in the open position and that locking clips engage fully. Test the ladder by opening and closing it three times to verify smooth operation.
6. Inspect the ladder feet for wear, cracks, or missing rubber pads. Place the ladder on a level surface and check that all four feet make full contact. Use a spirit level to confirm the ladder sits level. Replace any worn or missing feet immediately.
7. Verify that the ladder's duty rating label is legible and intact. If the label is missing or illegible, the ladder must be removed from service until the rating can be confirmed by the manufacturer. Check that the ladder is not overloaded for its type (e.g., Type III = 200 lbs max).
8. If the ladder passes all inspection points, attach a green colour-coded tag to the side rail near the top step. Write the inspection date, inspector initials, and ladder ID number on the tag. Record the inspection in the digital or paper log.
9. If the ladder fails any inspection point, attach a red colour-coded tag to the side rail and write 'DO NOT USE' on the tag. Immediately remove the ladder from service and place it in a designated quarantine area. Notify the supervisor and schedule the ladder for repair or disposal.
10. Complete the inspection log with the ladder ID, date, inspector name, pass/fail status, and any notes on defects found. File the log in the safety binder or upload it to the SafeDesk digital compliance system. Review the log monthly for trends in ladder failures.

Regulatory Disclaimer: This document is a generic safety template provided for educational and informational purposes only. It does not constitute professional engineering, legal, or regulatory compliance advice. The end-user assumes all liability for validating all safety protocols against specific machinery manufacturer manuals and local occupational health and safety regulations (e.g., WorkSafeBC, CSA standards) before deployment.