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Southwest Center

FOR AGRICULTURAL HEALTH, INJURY PREVENTION, AND EDUCATION

Monthly Safety Blast

Produced by the Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention and Education

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Tripod Orchard Ladder Safety

Every year many workers are injured from using tripod orchard ladders. These incidents are preventable. Workers, such as fruit pickers and landscapers, use this type of ladder regularly. Employers can prevent worker falls and injuries by following the safety measures described below.

A tripod orchard ladder is a portable, self-supporting ladder used in orchards and landscape maintenance, for tasks such as pruning and fruit harvesting. This type of ladder should not be used as an all-purpose ladder. They are designed with a flared base and a tripod pole that provides support on soft, uneven ground. In addition, these ladders have no spreader bar or locking mechanisms to hold its front in place or to stabilize the ladder. For a tripod orchard ladder to function properly and remain stable, the ladder side rails and tripod pole must slightly penetrate the ground.

Tripod Orchard Ladder Injuries and Hazards

Sprains and strains are the most common types of ladder injuries and are caused by overreaching, moving, lifting or carrying ladders. Fractures, concussions and dislocations are caused by falls as a result of an unstable ladder, overextension of the ladder's tripod pole, slipping or being struck by a falling ladder. In addition, poor weather conditions such as high winds or ladders too close to electrical lines have also caused fatalities. Back injuries can also occur from carrying the ladder incorrectly for long periods of time and over long distances.



Fall Prevention

When working on a ladder, falls are the most common hazard. More falls occur on the upper part of the ladder than in the middle or lower portions. Most falls are due to slippery steps, unstable ladders, and by not maintaining proper contact with the ladder. Employers can prevent most tripod ladder fall hazards by training workers and taking the following safety measures:

- Place the ladder firmly in the ground to keep it from collapsing, slipping, moving, or falling. Make sure that the ladder is not positioned over a soft spot or hole.
- Ladders placed on sloped ground must have the tripod pole positioned uphill.
- Routinely inspect ladders.
- Train workers to center themselves between the ladder's side rails and to use both hands to climb up and down the ladder.
- Select and provide required personal protective equipment (such as eye protection) for workers.
- Have workers wear non-slip shoes with stiff soles and a good sized heel.
- Train workers not to overreach beyond the ladder's side rails; the ladder should be moved to perform orchard work.
- Do not overfill produce bags.
- Do not stand or work on the ladder's top three steps.
- Train workers to never move from a ladder onto a tree branch or to stand on or use the branch for balance.

General Safety Precautions

Before work begins, hazards should be identified and eliminated by the employer. Some safeguards employers should implement include:

- Mark dangerous areas for workers to avoid, such as trees and electrical lines.
- Establish and enforce ladder safety rules.
- Ensure that only one worker is on each ladder.
- Do not allow other types of ladders to be used.
- Conduct daily safety talks.
- Select and use ladders appropriate for the worker and tree size.

Employers should train full-time and seasonal workers to recognize hazards and set up a process for workers to report unsafe conditions to supervisors immediately. Ladder safety training should be conducted by an experienced/knowledgeable person. Training should include ladder maintenance and storage, and how to properly respond to ladder injuries and incidents.



[NIOSH Ladder Safety App:](#)

The Ladder Safety App, NIOSH's first mobile application, is designed to improve extension and step ladder safety — a concern for those working in construction or any other task that requires ladder use.



Take the [Tripod Orchard Ladder Safety](#) quiz to test your knowledge!

Resources:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls/mobileapp.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls/default.html>
- https://www.osha.gov/Publications/portable_ladder_qc.html
- <http://www.americanladderinstitute.org/?page=BasicLadderSafety>

Disclaimer: The facts and information listed above are merely suggestions for your safety, but are in no way a comprehensive and exhaustive list of all actions needed to insure your safety.

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