



When It's Time to Update Your Fixed Ladder System

When your workers perform rooftop jobs, your number one priority is their safety. A variety of equipment exists for just that reason. Proper safety assurance is a process that develops through changing equipment and regulations, which is why you should always be aware of reasons to repair or update your systems.

Fixed ladders are some of the most important pieces of equipment your workers use. When working on roofs and maintenance platforms, workers depend on stable, reliable ladders to get them where they need to be. Performing routine maintenance and updates to your ladders will ensure safe working conditions for everyone.

Benefits of Fixed Ladders:

The right fixed ladder can make all the difference when completing projects that require precision and safety at great heights. Ultimately, fixed ladders specialize in providing versatility and convenience for your workers.

Installing fixed ladders on your work sites has many benefits, including:

Easy setup: These ladders are often much safer than ladders you set up and remove each day. While portable ladders are convenient, setting them up involves risks. Actions like leaning portable ladders at the wrong angle, standing them on an unstable surface or setting them up too close to a building can all result in injuries from the ladders shifting or falling. Alternatively, ladders that you permanently attach to a structure can stay set up and stable in the exact position you need them, eliminating the risk of injury from a faulty setup.

Additional safety measures: All newly installed fixed ladders over 24 feet must be equipped with fall protection systems. Having ladder fall protection ensures that a cable will catch a worker should they slip while using the ladder.

Simple transportation: Depending on the material, some fixed ladders are easy to pick up and move. For example, ladders made of aluminum, a light metal that makes transportation easy. You can lift these ladders into place during installation often without relying on a crane or other heavy lifting equipment.

Lightweight structure: Another bonus is that ladders made of lightweight aluminum add little additional weight to walls or roofs, so structures can avoid sagging under their weight even after years of use.

Noncorrosive material: Because aluminum is naturally resistant to rust, aluminum fixed ladders won't rust or wear away even after sitting outside for many years.

User comfort: Some fixed ladders will also prioritize comfort as much as they do safety. Ensure the fixed ladders you choose are ergonomically designed for user comfort, so climbers don't develop injuries or unhealthy working positions over time. Features such as innovative profiled rungs and anti-slip foot grips allow for safe use while taking comfort into account.

When to Update Your Fixed Ladders

Though fixed ladder systems are built to withstand heavy traffic and last for several years, even permanent fixtures need repair or replacement after a while.

One of the benefits of fixed ladders is that they stay in one place, effectively blending with your work environment. This fixed position makes them much safer than mobile ladders in many respects. However, taking fixed ladders for granted becomes an issue when you forget to routinely check up on them and look for changes or issues.

When does a fixed ladder become unsafe? It helps to inspect your company's fixed ladders regularly so you're immediately aware of any safety issues that arise. There are many signs that can tell you when it's time to update parts, or all, of your fixed ladder system.

OSHA/ANSI Compliance

OSHA ensures healthy and safe work environments by enforcing standards based on types of equipment and potential hazards, and ANSI promotes workplace and equipment standards. Although compliance with ANSI standards is voluntary, many companies view ANSI standards as minimum safety requirements to follow alongside mandatory OSHA regulations.

Overall, complying with both organizations' standards is the best practice to ensure maximum safety. Meet OSHA guidelines while considering your company's specific needs. If you feel you should go a few steps beyond the standards OSHA has set in place, you should take them.

Make sure all your workers understand the importance of OSHA regulations. It's smart for safety managers to conduct continuous training on various industry safety standards to ensure workers know how to act in the workplace. Be sure to specify correct ladder use and management to ensure your workers are always safe when using fixed ladders.

Even though you may think your fixed ladders are still in good condition, new OSHA or ANSI regulations could say otherwise. Keep yourself updated when either organization releases new regulations, and always check your ladders to make sure they're compliant with updated standards. If you find any differences between the standards and your ladders, it's time to update them.

OSHA creates standards for fixed ladders for details such as:

- Rung length and diameter
- Distance between rungs
- Distance between the ladder and the attached surface

- Step-across distance between the ladder and the nearest surface
- Types of additional safety equipment

OSHA released its most recent standards regarding fixed ladders in 2017. While many of today's ladders have been updated accordingly, including all ladders sold and installed after 2018, it's still important to confirm that your company's ladders meet the relatively new safety measures. Some of the most important OSHA fall protection standards include:

- All fixed ladders that extend over 24 feet high and were installed on or after November 19, 2018, must include fall protection systems.
- All fixed ladders that extend over 24 feet high that were installed before November 19, 2018, must include additional fall protection systems to comply with current standards.
- If any section of an existing fixed ladder was replaced on or after November 19, 2018, at least the replaced part, if not the entire ladder, must include a fall protection system.

OSHA no longer considers ladder cages to be a form of fall protection on new fixed ladder systems. By November 18, 2036, ladder cages will no longer be accepted as forms of fall protection on any fixed ladders. Instead, all fixed ladders over 24 feet tall must include currently approved forms of fall safety systems.

Fortunately, 2036 is over a decade away, so your company has some transition time if you still use fixed ladders with cages. However, you may want to consider replacing your caged ladders or adding additional fall protection systems sooner rather than later to create the safest conditions for your workers.

When OSHA releases new regulations, try to update your ladders as soon as possible — even before the written deadlines — to ensure maximum safety for your workers. Pay attention to the various deadlines OSHA releases so you can follow the rules that apply to your company's specific situation.

Additional Signs to Replace a Fixed Ladder

Beyond the basic fall protection standards, many other issues can cause fixed ladders to become unsafe, even ones that already include all the mandatory safety features. Other reasons to update your fixed ladder system include:

- Damaged Surfaces

If your fixed ladders' gripping surfaces have sharp edges, holes, burrs or rough patches, fix them immediately. When some parts of a fixed ladder are scratched or damaged to the point where people could get injured by touching them or snagging them on clothing, discontinue use of that ladder until you replace the damaged parts. Every worker should feel comfortable fully holding on to any parts of the ladder that will help them with their climb.

- Corrosion

Many fixed ladders are made of steel, which is a corrosive metal. Because some steel ladders aren't made from stainless steel, they can easily rust when exposed to all kinds of weather while attached to the sides of buildings. As rusted fixed ladders are a safety hazard, OSHA requires ladders to be made with corrosion-resistant material.

Touching rusted metal can lead to surface wounds and an increased risk of contracting tetanus. Additionally, rust on a ladder indicates that the metal supports are wearing away. These metal parts may soon become unable to support the same amount of weight they did when they were new.

To avoid workplace accidents associated with rusty metal, stop using corroding ladders and replace the defective parts. To prevent the issue from happening again in the future, you can opt for aluminum ladders over steel ones. With aluminum ladders, little maintenance is necessary to keep aluminum ladders in safe shape over time.

- Separation From Structures

One of the biggest benefits of fixed ladders is that once they're attached to a building, piece of equipment or other structure, they can stay in the same spot for a long time. This benefit means shorter setup times each day. However, though fixed ladders may seem permanent, continued use may cause fixed ladders to loosen and partially come apart from the structures.

A set of brackets that are screwed into the wall secure fixed ladders. These attachment brackets come in many sizes to suit different types of buildings. The structure's material will determine the specific attachment hardware used. No matter the material, you always want to make sure you secure the wall bracket in the recommended fashion. Make sure the bolts holding the ladders to the brackets are tight. If any screws are loose or missing, stop using the ladder and replace the bolts immediately.

- Structural Damages

The structures of fixed ladders may sustain a variety of damages, such as missing rails or rungs that are bent or split. These issues are a sign that your ladder no longer fully withstands the amount of weight and traffic it receives. Replace the bent parts and consider whether a full fixed ladder replacement is necessary based on your company's weight capacity needs.

Folding fixed ladders are especially important to inspect because they have multiple hinges and other moving parts. Always make sure the folding ladder's rails fully extend and lock in place properly. Repair any damaged parts to fulfill the fixed ladder's original design criteria and OSHA regulations.

Furthermore, long-term maintenance can ensure fixed ladder longevity. Understanding what issues to look out for means you and your crew will be better equipped to notice hazards and update your fixed ladders as necessary.

When working at great heights, safety is a top priority. Whether your fixed ladder systems are out of date with current safety laws or you've noticed areas of damage, you may need to update your ladders with repairs or replacement parts.

W.W. Cannon offers a wide variety of customizable ladder options, so you can maximize your equipment's usage while receiving the protection you need. All W.W. Cannon fixed ladder systems are safe and OSHA/ANSI compliant.