



What is *Common Ground*?

Common Ground shares practical ideas that address the top safety and health issues facing electricians.

Common Ground is based on real-world practices used by Washington electrical contractors.

Reduce on-the-job injuries: try at least one new idea from each of the 5 editions:

- Worksite Hazard Analysis
- ✓ **Ladder Safety**
- Working De-Energized
- Housekeeping
- Lockout/Tagout

If you have a safety idea that you would like to share, or to make comments about this publication, we would like to hear from you.

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What Washington State electrical contractors are saying about...

Ladder Safety



Why Invest in Ladder Safety?

Managers, journeymen, apprentices, and training center staff agree that ladder hazards are one of the top three safety and health concerns for electrical contractors in Washington State.

“Electricians spend 80% of their working life on a ladder...so keeping that in mind...ladder safety is pretty important for us.”

-- Electrical Training Center Staff

Step up ladder safety on your job site

Tried-and-true tips from contractors and electricians on 3 common ladder issues:



1. Standing too high on a ladder

- √ Supply lifts when possible
- √ Ensure adequate supply

"...make sure they supply enough of the right ladder, because on a ladder job the 8- and the 10-foot ladders are going to get eaten up real quick and then that just leaves the 6, and when you got a job to do with no ladders it's awful tempting just to climb right up there."

-- Electrician

2. Poor ladder condition

- √ Require a daily checklist to inspect ladders
- √ Require the foreman to verify that daily checklist was completed
- √ Destroy defective ladders

"In one case, we had an injury because of an old wooden ladder that was pretty rickety and basically falling apart. Well, they took that ladder and put some tape on it and stuck in over in the corner and said this is garbage, don't use it. Well, after about a month, the tape came off and it went back into service."

-- Electrician

3. Improper use of ladders

- √ Train electricians not to over-extend the body when on a ladder.
- √ Teach the belt buckle rule:

One safety manager explains the rule this way...

"...if you keep your belt buckle between the rails, you won't get in a position to lose balance one direction or the other. It's just a simple rule of thumb that's been used for years and years."

And an electrician learns about the rule and responds...

"...you don't really want to get down and move that ladder. You've got one last connector to crimp down and you just think if you could just lean out a little bit and get it and then boom, you wipe out. So I guess that belt buckle rule is -- at least that keeps someone thinking that, you know what, in this case I should go ahead and move this ladder."

Company close-up: ladders and beyond

One contractor has a centralized equipment location and a dedicated tool and equipment manager. At the start of any new project, the foreman develops a list of all the ladders, tools, and equipment (such as lifts) that will be needed, and places an order with the tool and equipment manager. The tool and equipment manager's job is to inspect everything and ensure regulatory compliance. All equipment is then labeled after inspection. The order is then sent out to the construction site. On arrival, the foreman makes sure all the ladders and tools are in good shape, and then puts all the materials in place.

Positive outcome:

The company's safety manager and foremen believe that their ladders are in excellent condition. A wide assortment of step ladders (6', 8', 10', 12', and 14') is stocked and available, so not having the right size ladder to do the job is never an issue.

Falls from ladders can result in serious and costly injuries

\$1,343

An electrical apprentice was hammering while standing on the second to last step of a 6-foot, 3-legged ladder. The ladder was reportedly unlocked and one of the legs "kicked out" causing the ladder to fall. He landed on his back on some lumber and suffered a low back sprain.

\$2,112

A journeyman electrician fell approximately 5 feet from a ladder and landed on his right wrist. He was diagnosed with a fractured wrist and a head contusion. He was off work a total of 24 days.

\$586

An electrician was working on a 14-foot extension ladder when it slid out from under him. He fell approximately 12 feet with his foot caught between two steps of the ladder. When he landed, he twisted his ankle and was treated for a sprain.

\$29,344

A journeyman electrician was pulling wire while standing on a 12-foot ladder. As he pulled the wire, the clamp on the end of the fish tape broke off, causing him to fall approximately 8 feet. He badly fractured his ankle, which required surgery to repair. He was off work for over 100 days.

Note: Dollar amounts represent workers' compensation costs paid by L&I - medical bills and/or partial wages.

Copies of all *Common Ground* editions as well as the publication, *Electrical Contractors Industry Focus Group Report* can be found on SHARP's web site:

<https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/completed-projects/healthy-workplaces-electrical-millwork-food#overview>.

All quotes, opinions and company practices were solicited through focus groups and interviews conducted by L&I's Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program. This publication seeks to promote practical safety strategies; it does not attempt to interpret whether the opinions expressed meet the Washington State Administrative Code.



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