

# Colwall Orchard Group: Safe Way of Working: SWOW01 - Use of Ladders

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Review: Annually thereafter (or in the event of an accident)

Reviewed by: C Blake 25 July 2022

Next review: by 31 April 2023

Volunteers working for COG are governed by the Work at Heights Regulations 2005 (any activity from which a fall may be anticipated, other than from built in staircases). Under these regulations, activities must be properly planned (including emergency planning), must be appropriately supervised and must be carried out in a manner which is, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe.

- Section 5 – requires COG to ensure that anyone engaging in, planning, organising or supervising work at height (including the use of work equipment) must be competent to do so or, if being trained, is being supervised by a competent person such as a Lead Volunteer.
- Section 6 – sets a hierarchy of protection. Use the pre-activity checklist to ensure that volunteers only work at height if absolutely necessary. Take appropriate steps to prevent falls. Take appropriate steps to minimise consequences of falls. Section 10 – sets the same hierarchy with respect to falling objects.
- Section 7 – requires the selection of suitable equipment for use (giving priority to collective precautions rather than individual ones). Use of ladders is subject to Schedule 6.

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- Section 12 – requires COG to inspect relevant kit (before use and after incidents, to check their suitability for use) and to keep records of these inspections. (Faulty kit must be removed from use or repaired or replaced.) Section 12 also requires a competent person to inspect ladders after installation and before use by volunteers (to ensure compliance with safety guidance).

**Note:** Where appropriate checks & procedures are in place, in accordance with these Regulations, as detailed in this SWOW, short duration orchard tasks can be carried out safely from ladders.

Ladders must meet the appropriate standard. EN 131

COG insurance limits us to working at heights up to 8m only.

### Ladders

The term ladder is used to cover stepladders, tripod ladders and straight ladders. COG strongly recommends the use of tripod ladders for most orchard based activities on the following grounds:

- Being topiary ladders, the claw feet are designed for use on soft and uneven ground (reducing risks of slips, kick outs etc)
- The tripod foot allows the ladder to be placed in a stable position on uneven ground and without relying on any structural support from the trees (thereby eliminating ladder shift due to inadequate support, if branches sway or break or due to branch rebound when limbs are being cut)
- The tripod foot allows placing of the ladder within the tree canopy so that workers can be positioned correctly in relation to the work site.
- The splayed stiles mean that it is difficult to accidentally overreach past the point of stability

COG has:

- 9 topiary ladders (8 x Niwaki, 1 other) – used for all orchard based tasks, particularly harvesting
- 2 stepladders, generally used for building maintenance and decoration etc prior to events, hence mainly being used on concrete surfaces.
- 3 straight ladders, which are vintage wooden cherry picking ladders. These are for display purposes only, and should not be used as ladders.

### Storage of ladders

Stepladders should be stored upright, leaning against a flat surface. They must not be hung vertically from one of the rungs.

The tripod ladders and stepladders are stored in the Apple Packing Shed which is kept locked.

No materials should be stored on top of or against any ladders, to prevent damage or warping.

## **Ladder maintenance and pre-use**

Ladders are used infrequently, so a pre-use check by a competent person is considered to be more appropriate than regular monthly inspections. An inspection should be carried out and recorded in the Ladder Log Book for this purpose.

When doing an inspection, look for:

- damaged or worn ladder feet;
- twisted, bent or dented stiles;
- cracked, worn, bent or loose rungs;
- missing or damaged tie rods;
- cracked or damaged welded joints, loose rivets or damaged stays.

Any ladders found to be defective must be labelled to indicate that it is not to be used and this should be reported to a COG board member so that arrangements can be made to repair, discard or replace as appropriate.

## **Ladder Transport**

Ladders carried on vehicles must be adequately supported to avoid sagging or warping and should be tied to each support point to minimise movement in transit.

Any protruding sections of ladder must be marked in accordance with Highway Code requirements. This includes the requirement to ensure that a ladder should not overhang the front or the rear of a vehicle by more than 2m and it must have side and/or end markers.

Avoid placing other loads on the ladder as this can cause deformation/sagging.

Do not allow a ladder to overhang more than 2m from the last point of support on the vehicle.

Once on site, long, heavy or awkward ladders should be carried by two people whenever possible, with one person at each end. If carrying the ladder alone, balance the centre of the ladder on your shoulder, against your body and maintain clearance between the ladder and other people in the vicinity (behind as well as in front). Be especially careful going around corners or through narrow spaces

When using metal ladders on sites with overhead electrical cables, ensure ladders are carried by 2 people, holding the ladder at their side, to minimise the risk of accidental contact in transit.

## **Positioning the ladder**

Ensure that the ladders used are of correct length, strength etc, for the intended purpose (Ladder to extend at least 1.05m above the highest rung to be stood on unless there is a secure handhold to give equivalent support). The ladder must be positioned with care to

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avoid accidental collapse, kick back or fall. Do not use aluminium ladders within 6m of electricity cables.

Plan the activity to be undertaken (including manoeuvring the ladder into place) before erecting the ladder. Choose the location carefully to ensure the safest possible working configuration taking into account ground conditions and slope, tree shape and branch distribution, potential impacts from any falling or swinging branches, the location within the tree and the nature of the planned activity.

Position the ladders so that the user faces the working area and is not operating sideways on.

Ensure the ladders are erected according to manufacturer's recommendations.

**Stepladders** should only be used on level ground. Stepladders must be locked into the correct position and the platform should be level. If it is a multi-way design, ensure that it is in the right configuration for the planned work. If there is any wobble on the ladder, reposition it, or get a co-worker to foot the ladder whilst in use (Footing: face ladder, with a hand on each stile and one foot on bottom rung). Stepladders must not be propped against the tree and used as a ladder.

**Tripod ladders:** move the ladder into position with foot retracted if needed. On sloping ground, wherever possible place the stile feet parallel to, rather than perpendicular to, the slope. Ensure the tripod foot is extended to the maximum spread permitted by the restraining chain. Adjust the height of the tripod foot to ensure the steps are level (see guide stickers on stiles) and lock in place. Ensure the ladder is not inadvertently lodged on any obstructing branches.

Create exclusion zones around the working area if needed, using suitable signs, cones or lookouts (especially if workers are dispersed around the site, the site is open to the public or there are vehicles operating in the vicinity).

### Working on the ladder

Any task involving working on ladders should be supervised by a competent person, who is:

- familiar with the provisions of HSE guidelines GS 31 on safe use of ladders,
- capable of instructing volunteers in safe use
- able to supervise and monitor the activity.

Ladders are only to be used by people who feel confident and physically capable of using them. Lone working at height is not allowed.

Users must be wearing appropriate sturdy footwear with good grip (flat shoes are recommended), and their clothing should be snug fitting without any obvious snagging points.

The user should keep both hands free when climbing or descending the ladder. All materials and other equipment should be carried aloft in belt loops, holsters or carry bags.

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Users must not stand on the top 3 rungs/1.05m of ladder unless there is a handrail to provide equivalent support.

Only one person is allowed to ascend the ladder at a time. The area under the ladder must be kept clear of other volunteers to minimise the risk of kit or falling timber etc injuring bystanders. Where needed, a second person should foot the ladder, wearing a hard hat if appropriate to the task.

Users must maintain 3 points of contact with the ladder at all times. Where 2 hands are needed for the task in hand, knees or hips can provide the third anchor point. Users must keep legs and hips between the 2 stiles. If users feel the need to lean to reach the work, they should go back down to the ground and re-position the ladder.

### **Incidents**

Incidents likely to lead to damage to the ladders (e.g. collisions, falls etc) must be reported to a COG Board member who should ensure that the safety of the ladder is checked prior to further use.

Defective ladders should be removed or clearly marked to prevent further use on site and reported to a COG Board member as above so that they can be repaired or discarded and replaced.

Any accidents or near misses must be entered into the Accident book and reported to a member of the Board at the earliest opportunity.

### **Further Information**

Please also refer to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Safe use of ladders and stepladders - A brief guide.

This is a web-friendly version of leaflet INDG455, published July 2021.

<https://ladderassociation.org.uk/la455/>

Portable Ladders What does this mean for you? Guidance Note EN131 Version 2

[https://ladderassociation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GuidanceNotes\\_EN131\\_Version2.pdf](https://ladderassociation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GuidanceNotes_EN131_Version2.pdf)