SHARP START

January 12 — Remember Ladders Last

Observed an extension ladder left in place without being secured at the top or bottom. The ladder was positioned on an uneven surface and leaned against a rounded pipe, which is not a stable or approved support point. No tie-off or fall protection controls were in place, and no alternative access methods appeared to have been evaluated.	**This created a potential fall hazard for anyone climbing or working near the ladder. The ladder was removed and properly staged.**

The ladder didn't fail the setup did. Uneven footing and a rounded contact point create movement that can't be seen until weight is applied. Once someone climbs, small shifts at the base or top translate into sudden ladder movement. Without tie-off or stabilization, the ladder is relying entirely on friction and balance, neither of which are reliable controls.

A ladder leaned where pipes are round,
Will move the moment weight is found.
Level ground and tie it tight,
So feet stay firm and falls stay out of sight.

This type of setup often comes from convenience. The ladder is nearby, the task looks short, and evaluation gets skipped.

Hazards

- Ladder slip at the base due to uneven surface
- Ladder kick-out or roll at the top contact point
- Loss of balance while climbing or working
- Fall from elevation resulting in serious injury
- Secondary injuries to workers below

Stats

- Falls remain OSHA's leading cause of fatalities in construction
- A large percentage of ladder incidents involve improper setup, not ladder failure
- Unsecured ladders significantly increase the likelihood of kick-out events
- Rounded or unstable contact points greatly reduce ladder friction and stability

Words of Wisdom

- A ladder is only as safe as what it's set on and what it's set against.
- If it can move, it will eventually.

Pause and Think

Ladders often get treated as temporary access, which lowers how much planning goes into the setup. When the surface isn't level or the contact point can roll, the ladder becomes unpredictable under load. Skipping tie-off or stabilization assumes nothing will change — but weight, movement, and gravity always change things. Evaluating access before placing the ladder is what prevents relying on balance as a control.

- What makes a ladder setup "good enough" — and why?
- When should ladder access be replaced with a different method?
- What signs tell you the ladder isn't truly stable before climbing?