

A New Québec Regulation on the Use of Ladders and Stepladders

November 01, 2016

The CNESST published a notice of a draft regulation in the *Gazette officielle* concerning the use of ladders and stepladders on worksites.

The *Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail* (the "CNESST"), on September 28, 2016, published a notice of a draft regulation in the *Gazette officielle* concerning the use of ladders and stepladders on worksites. That may seem quite mundane. Nevertheless, according to a regulatory impact assessment by the CNESST, dated August 12, 2016:

[TRANSLATION]

Industrial accidents attributable to inappropriate use of ladders or stepladders are leading to serious consequences, and even to deaths, every year. Over the last five years, 35% of work accidents have occurred as a result of falls from ladders and stepladders. It is recognized that these accidents are often attributable to an unstable surface, inappropriate use, poor installation, an inadequate choice or the defective condition of the equipment. [...] Hence, although their use is simple, preventive measures must be applied in order to avoid what may often turn out to be a tragic accident.

The CNESST is therefore dusting off the *Regulation respecting occupational health and safety* with respect to these tools. In some respects, that is just a matter of common sense, but we would remind you that a non-conforming use may entail penal complaints, resulting in fines of between \$1,613 and \$3,255, and of up to \$12,899 for repeat offences.

The draft regulation clarifies the conditions governing the use, installation and manufacture of these tools and promotes the adoption of best practices. If the draft as published is adopted, it will be prohibited:

- (1) to use a portable ladder or a stepladder near an exposed electrical circuit, if it is made of metal or is metal-reinforced;
- (2) to use a portable ladder or a stepladder as a horizontal support;

(3) to stand up on

(a) the last 2 rungs of a portable ladder;

(b) the top rung, on the pail shelf, on the rear section or on the top of a stepladder, except if it was so designed by the manufacturer;

(4) to use the intermediate or upper section of a multiple-section ladder or of an extension ladder as the lower section, unless such use is authorized by the manufacturer.

The safety precautions applicable to the use of these tools are also clarified. The worker shall:

(1) be facing the portable ladder or stepladder at all times;

(2) remain in the centre of the steps or rungs of the portable ladder or stepladder and comply at all times with the maximum height indicated by the manufacturer;

(3) maintain 3 points of contact while climbing or descending the portable ladder or stepladder, unless a means of protection against falls is used.

That latter standard, the three-points-of-contact rule, clearly illustrates how such a regulation can subtly complicate the performance of certain tasks. Imagine climbing up a stepladder to reach three boxes of a product stored high up (shoe boxes, for example), and you will quickly conclude that it will be practically impossible to climb back down the stepladder with your hands full while still complying with the three-points-of-contact rule. It may perhaps be necessary to make three trips or to develop another tool to gain access to the stock.

At the very least, a revision and updating of the training program on the use of portable ladders and stepladders would be indicated.

The CNESST foresees implementing a public relations plan to inform employers of the new provisions governing the manufacture, verification, selection and use of ladders and stepladders when the final version of the regulation is published, and it also plans to publish an informational guideline on the safe use of portable ladders and stepladders in 2017, in order to facilitate gaining further knowledge, as well as the adoption and observance of best practices.

By

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