

More men being injured and killed falling off ladders, study finds

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The climb can be just a couple of metres for the growing scores of men aged over 50 who are being profoundly injured and in some cases killed by falling off ladders at their homes.

Every year, on average, three Victorians are killed falling off ladders - and they have almost exclusively been men aged over 55 who have fallen while doing odd jobs at home, according to research by The Alfred hospital that was recently published in the *Injury* journal.

Among those who died were two men - aged in their 60s and 80s - who lost their lives while pruning, and a man in his 60s who was clearing his gutters. Most had fallen from fewer than three metres, many from two metres and one man aged in his 50s had died after falling just one metre.

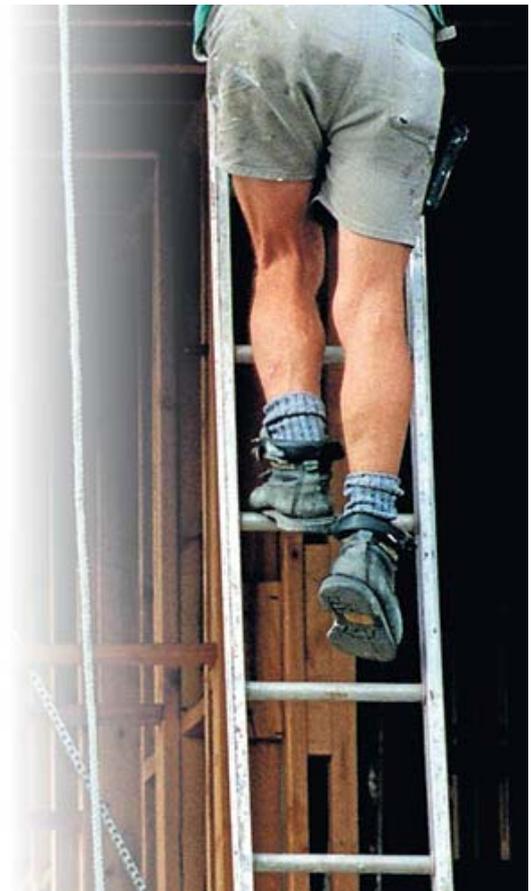
Going up

Alfred Hospital, June 2007-2011

Of **548** admissions after ladder falls, **58** patients went to intensive care, **15** died, **26** went to rehab or a nursing home and **17** returned home.

100 people who fell off ladders went to the Alfred in June 2007 compared with **190** in June 2014. There were **30** major trauma cases in the year to June 2007 and **50** in the year to June 2014.

Source: Alfred Hospital



In the five years from 2007 to 2011, 584 Victorians were admitted to The Alfred hospital after falling off ladders. Of those, 194 were major trauma cases, 58 ended up in the intensive care unit where they relied on machines to breathe, and 15 tragically ended in death.

Dr Helen Ackland, who led the study, said that of 58 patients who were admitted with extremely serious injuries, only 43 per cent were at home able to care for themselves a year after the accident. "Even the survivors are finding it hard to get back to themselves," she said.

"You just don't climb ladders," says 56-year-old carpenter Garry Richter, whose life was permanently changed by a ladder fall that left him with lifelong physical and mental injuries nearly four years ago.

A tradesman for more than three decades, Richter fell coming down a three-metre ladder and was left with injuries to his brain, ribs, back, hip and shoulder. "I haven't got concentration, I just can't do the things I used to be able to do," he says.

Geoff Moroney, 57, blacked out coming down a ladder and fell two metres onto his left side where his arm pierced through his rib cage. He spent a week in a coma and eight years later still has about a half dozen ribs that won't heal.

The numbers of serious ladder injuries have continued to rise in the years since the research was completed, Dr Ackland said, with total admissions for ladder falls nearly doubling from 100 in the year to June 2007 to 190 in the year to June 2014.

Major trauma admissions due to ladder falls also increased dramatically over seven years from 30 in 2007 to nearly 50 in 2014, she said, adding that she believes the rises are linked to the ageing baby boomer population and the rise of do-it-yourself building reality television shows such as *The Block*.

The team of researchers behind the study - drawn from The Alfred's Intensive Care Department, National Trauma Research Institute, Emergency and Trauma Centre and Monash University, are about to begin a second study to determine what is causing the increase in ladder falls, which will begin next month.

They have also released a [ladder safety guide](#), urging those over 55 or inexperienced to hire a professional for odd jobs up ladders or, at the very least, to wear a bicycle helmet.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/more-men-being-injured-and-killed-falling-off-ladders-study-finds-20160222-gn0jco.html>