



Telescopic Ladders

Consumer Behaviour Report

Exploring telescopic ladder users' buying behaviours; where they buy from, what influences their purchase decisions, and what safeguards they take to make informed purchases



A consumer market research study from the Ladder Association, funded by the Office for Product Safety and Standards, and commissioned as part of our ongoing 'Step Up to Safe Ladders' campaign

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01 INTRODUCTION

Telescopic Ladders - A Popular Choice

Telescopic leaning ladders have become more popular in recent years, largely due to the fact they require a small storage space compared to other types of ladder, they're lightweight and compact, and are adjustable in size and working height. These characteristics make telescopic ladders ideal for tradesmen to store in their vans, or the home DIYer to pop quite easily in a garden shed without taking up too much space.

Testing The Market

However, with that popularity comes risk.

The Ladder Association has been highlighting the real and serious issue of the availability and use of substandard imported telescopic ladders on the UK market for many years.

So much so, that in May 2022, the Ladder Association, in partnership with the East of England Trading Standards Association (EETSA), Suffolk Trading Standards Imports Team and the Test & Research Centre, embarked on a telescopic ladder surveillance survey.

The Association undertook limited scope testing on a sample of telescopic ladders, obtained anonymously from a range of sources. While a small number were purchased from physical stores, the majority were bought from online stores and online marketplaces, an accurate reflection of how these products reach the market.

The samples were put through their paces against a series of safety critical tests to investigate their conformity with product standard EN 131-6 (known in the UK as BS EN 131 Part 6:2019).

Risk To Consumer Safety

The safety tests, carried out by the UK-based test laboratory and certification body, Test & Research Centre, found:

80% of the telescopic ladders tested did not meet the minimum safety requirements designed to keep users safe.

Worse still, some manufacturers of these unsafe products consciously misled consumers by claiming they did meet the product standard.

Rising Popularity Of Online Platforms

According to research conducted by the Office for National Statistics, as many as 9 in 10 adults who use the internet shop via online marketplaces.¹

As it stands, online marketplaces selling products supplied by third-party sellers, have no responsibility for preventing unsafe goods being sold on their platforms, and no legal obligation to inform consumers if they have purchased unsafe goods.

Our Consumer Market Research

In a bid to gain a better understanding of telescopic ladder users' buying behaviours; where they buy from, what influences their purchase decisions, and what safeguards they take to make informed purchases, we commissioned this consumer research survey.

The survey was funded by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), the regulatory body responsible for developing national capacity for product safety in the UK.

Using the services of an external market research company, we anonymously interviewed 1,063 buyers of telescopic ladders, aged 18+, living in the UK, and who purchased the ladders in the last 3 years.

This report presents the results of the survey.

The research survey is part of the Ladder Association's wider market surveillance initiative 'Step Up to Safe Ladders'.

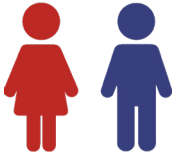
Additional information and all of the reports relating to the campaign are freely available on the Ladder Association website:

<https://ladderassociation.org.uk/step-up/>

¹ Office for National Statistics – Retail sales, Great Britain: June 2023

02 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

Q. Who responded to our survey?



52% female
48% male

over 70%
were aged 25 - 54 years

Q. Where are respondents planning to use their telescopic ladder?

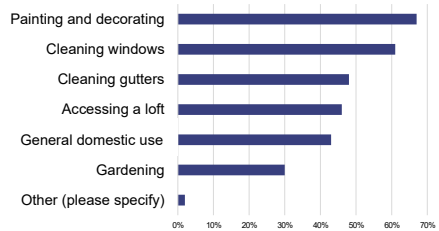
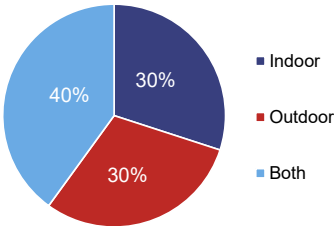


89%
planned to use their telescopic ladder for tasks at home



26%
also planned to use their telescopic ladder for work

Q. How are respondents planning to use their telescopic ladder?



Overall, 71% of those surveyed said they would be using their telescopic ladder for cleaning tasks, including cleaning gutters and windows.

Q. Where did you buy your last telescopic ladder from?



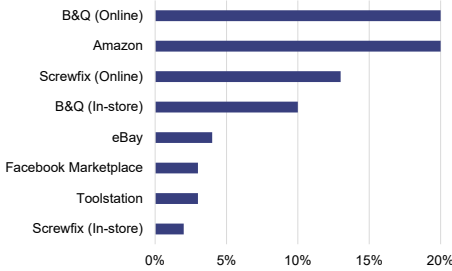
72%
bought online

7 in 10 (72%) of consumers purchased their telescopic ladder online.



1 in 3
were bought from
an online marketplace

42% of these online purchases being from an online major retailer, and 30% from an online marketplace. Only one in five (20%) consumers purchased from a physical store.



Consumers primarily purchased their ladders from **B&Q** (20% online; 10% in-store), **Amazon** (20%) and **Screwfix** (13% online; 2% in-store).

Other retailers where telescopic ladders were purchased from include eBay (4%), Facebook Marketplace (3%) and Toolstation (3%).

Q. What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?



68%
said that price was one
of their top 3 priorities



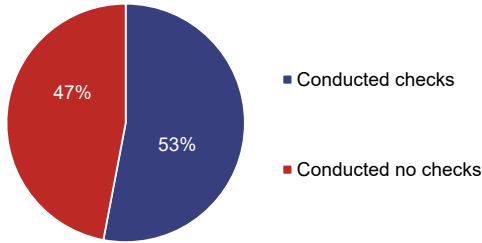
Price is the key factor informing consumers' purchase decisions for a telescopic ladder, with 29% ranking price as their first consideration, and 68% ranking price in the top 3. Home ladder users were more likely to buy based on price.

Product reviews came in as the second most important factor, with 16% of respondents putting it at the top of their priorities, and 49% of all respondents placing it in their top 3.

Product safety/reference to quality marks were ranked as next important, with 13% ranking it their top consideration, and 38% placing it in their top 3.

62% of people DID NOT consider 'product safety/reference to quality marks' as one of their top 3 priorities when making their purchasing decision.

Q. What checks - if any - did you carry out when researching telescopic ladders to buy?



Respondents reported carrying out the following checks (53%) before buying their telescopic ladder:

- Checked for 3rd party accreditation to EN 131 (28%);
- Requested the product safety certificates from the seller (35%).

47% (almost half) of people we surveyed, carried out absolutely NO CHECKS before buying their telescopic ladder!

Consumers are placing their trust that the products being sold to them online and in store are safe to use.

Respondents who carried out no checks (47%) said that they didn't do so because:

- 'I didn't feel I needed to' (30%);
- 'I didn't know I could check' (12%);
- 'It didn't even cross my mind' (6%).

Those using their telescopic ladder solely for work were found to be more likely to have conducted some form of check when researching, however this did not necessarily prevent the person having an accident.

Q. Have you ever had an accident using a telescopic ladder?



1 in 5
people said they had an accident

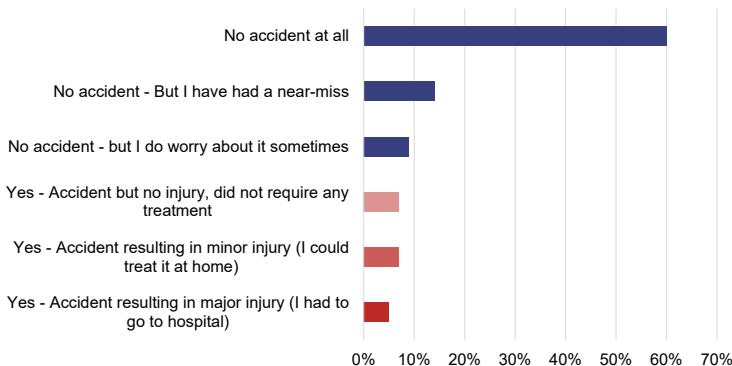


5%
of accidents required hospital treatment!

Almost 1 in 5 respondents (17%) reported having an accident using a telescopic ladder.

For just over 1 in 10 (12%), this has resulted in an injury (5% major injury, requiring hospital treatment; 7% minor injury, requiring at-home treatment).

And while **60% had no accident at all**, there were near-misses (14%) and worries about the risk of having an accident (9%).



Accidents based on retail channel



Those who bought telescopic ladders from Amazon were significantly more likely to have had an accident compared to those who bought from dedicated hardware retailers, with **almost 1 in 5 (19%) who bought from Amazon claiming to have had an accident.**

A similar proportion (20%) who bought a telescopic ladder from eBay reported having an accident, providing additional indicative evidence that purchases from online marketplaces result in more accidents.

This figure is much higher than when compared to those ladders bought from other retailers:

- B&Q - 12% reported to have an accident;
- Screwfix - 11% reported to have an accident;
- Toolstation - 11% reported to have an accident;
- Wickes - 7% reported to have an accident.



Accidents based on location and ladder use



2 x
twice as likely to have a ladder accident at work

Those who are using their telescopic ladder solely for work were more likely to have had an accident when using it for home use (31% vs. 16% solely for home use and 17% for both home and work use), including one which resulted in an injury (23% vs. 11% solely for home use, and 12% for both home and work use).

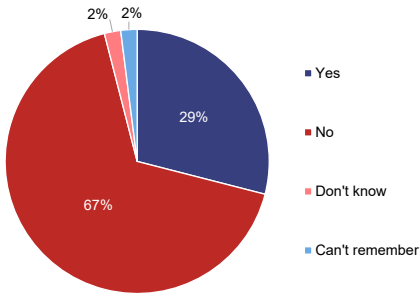


A higher proportion of people reported ladder accidents when using the telescopic ladder indoors than outdoors (25% indoors vs. 18% outdoors).



The highest proportion of people who had an accident using their telescopic ladder reported using it for **painting and decorating tasks** (58%), cleaning windows (52%) and accessing a loft (42%).

Q. Have you ever had any formal ladder training?



When asked about training, **29% of respondents said they had received 'formal' ladder training** and cited the type of training as:

- Other (39%);
- Health and safety training (18%);
- Workplace training (18%);
- Basic 'how-to' training (9%);
- Working at height training (4%);
- Online training (3%);
- Ladder training (3%);
- Manual handling training (3%);
- College / University training (2%).

30% of people who had training still had an accident

The research showed that having formal ladder training (or conducting checks) does not necessarily prevent an individual from having an accident.

Those who said they had 'formal' ladder training were still more likely to have had an accident versus those who have not (30% vs. 10%).



Could this be related to the type of training they have received?

Q. How satisfied are you with your telescopic ladder purchase?



9 in 10 said the telescopic ladder they purchased overall...

- ✓ Meets their needs
- ✓ Feels safe to use
- ✓ Is value for money
- ✓ They would recommend
- ✓ They would buy again

Of those surveyed, around **90% were satisfied overall with their purchases**, when asked to rank their satisfaction against a range of criteria:

- Meeting their needs (92% agree);
- Felt safe to use (90%);
- Value for money (88%);
- Product description matched product (90%);
- Would recommend to family and friends (88%);
- Would buy again (86%).

70% of people who had an accident STILL said they WOULD recommend the product to friends/family.

Does this mean they believe they were at fault for the accident, not the product?

03 CONCLUSION

With 7 in 10 (72%) respondents having purchased their telescopic ladder online, it's clear to see the popularity of online shopping.

While 42% of these online purchases were made from an online major retailer, almost one third (30%) were bought from an online marketplace. Only 1 in 5 (20%) consumers purchased their telescopic ladder from a physical store.

These figures highlight the shift in recent years from traditional 'bricks-and-mortar' stores to online platforms, marketplaces and retailers.

DIY giants B&Q prove the most popular choice overall for buyers who took part in our survey (30% of purchases - 20% online; 10% in-store), with Amazon joint top for their share of online sales (20%).

The research showed that price is the key factor informing consumers' purchase decisions for a telescopic ladder, with 29% ranking price as their first consideration, and 68% ranking price in the top 3. Home ladder users are also more likely to buy based on price than those who plan to use their ladders solely for work.

Worryingly, when it comes to the product itself, almost two thirds (62%) of people did not consider 'product safety/reference to quality marks' as one of their top 3 priorities when making their purchasing decision. The fact that consumers rarely consider the safety of their products reflects an inherent trust in the product safety system to protect them, and a lack of awareness of substandard products available on the UK market today, particularly online.¹

While it is encouraging to see almost half of survey respondents take time to carry out pre-purchase checks, on the flip side, that means the remaining half (47%) did not carry out any checks at all, leaving them potentially vulnerable to rogue traders and at risk of buying potentially unsafe and dangerous equipment.

It is concerning that almost 1 in 5 respondents (17%) reported having had an accident using a telescopic ladder - that figure being twice as likely in the workplace.

And even more concerning, that 5% of those accidents resulted in a major injury requiring hospital treatment.

In addition, the research highlighted that those consumers who bought telescopic ladders online from Amazon are significantly more likely to have had an accident compared to those who bought from dedicated DIY/building-specific retailers.

A similar proportion (20%) who bought a telescopic ladder from eBay reported having an accident, which provides additional indicative evidence that purchases from online platforms and marketplaces result in a higher number of ladder accidents.

We would expect that formal training would help reduce the number of accidents, yet the research showed those who had received 'formal' training were still more likely to have had an accident than those who had received no training. That being said, the majority of training that respondents reported to have attended fell into the 'other' category. We would deduce from this that the accident rate may be reflective of the lack of appropriate and specific ladder training.

While we do not know the exact cause of the accidents reported in this survey, we do know that selling platforms assume no responsibility for the safety of goods sold by third parties.

These platforms have become increasingly popular with people who sell from home rather than business premises, or from overseas, both of which present challenges for regulators to investigate or take enforcement action.

Buying online can present challenges as users are unable to inspect the product prior to purchase, they cannot review any stated conformity with product standard, and they are unable to 'get a feel' for the quality of the product.

The Ladder Association again calls for urgent action from the UK Government to make regulatory changes to hold suppliers and online platforms accountable for ensuring the products they sell are compliant and safe to use.

¹ Ladder Association 'Step Up to Safe Ladders' market surveillance studies - <https://ladderassociation.org.uk/step-up/>

04 GUIDANCE FOR CONSUMERS

Guidance from the Ladder Association when buying telescopic ladders online or in store:

- **Take some time to research before you buy.** You can carry out a quick online check of the company or brand to check their business location and visibility in the market. If they don't have a UK/EU address then it can make it much more difficult to contact them if you have an issue after you buy;
- **Check product reviews.** These are a great way of hearing first-hand from other consumers and often give valuable insight in the product quality, mainly if it falls below standard. But beware, some companies and brands post fake positive reviews, so read them carefully, note where the reviewer is based or how many reviews they have previously posted;
- **Don't make decisions solely on price.** But, if something is very cheap, you should question why. That's not to say it's poor quality, but it's certainly a prompt to make you do a bit more homework. Genuine quality products can cost more to manufacture due to the enhanced testing and cost of materials, but equally, a higher price doesn't necessarily mean quality;
- **Remember, online platforms take little or no responsibility for the quality or safety of the products sold on their platforms** and place the responsibility for safety firmly with the seller. Don't assume product safety and compliance checks have been carried out by them before they placed them online for sale;
- **Don't assume physical stores sell only safe products.** They could knowingly - or unknowingly - be stocking products that don't meet product standard EN 131. Check labelling for print quality or spelling errors, check product quality as best you can, and speak to the retailer if you have any questions;
- **Avoid ladders that are CE or UKCA Marked.** Despite what you might think, ladders cannot be CE or UKCA marked, so avoid any that bear those markings;
- **Buy from a Ladder Association member.** Members are committed to high standards of safety, and by joining the Association, they pledge to only make or sell ladders that comply with EN 131 (or international equivalents) and are certified by a third-party Conformity Assessment Body. A full list of members can be found on the Ladder Association website: <https://ladderassociation.org.uk>
- **When you receive your ladder, check it.** Check the product, the instruction manual (every ladder should come with one) and the labelling on the ladder itself;
- **If you think the ladder is unsafe, dangerous or not made to standard, don't use it!** You should then contact your local Trading Standards team or report via our website: <https://ladderassociation.org.uk/step-up>

05 ABOUT THE LADDER ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1947, the Ladder Association is the not-for-profit lead industry body dedicated to promoting the safe use of portable ladders.

Members include manufacturers, rental companies, training providers and ladder users. Separately, these businesses innovate and compete. But when it comes to advancing user safety, they all work together.

Membership of the Ladder Association shows clear commitment to adhere to the Ladder Association Code of Practice which puts safety at the heart of everything members do:

- **Ladder Association Manufacturers** only make ladders that comply with EN 131 (or international equivalents) and those products must be certified by a third-party Conformity Assessment Body and be subject to ongoing surveillance;
- **Ladder Association Suppliers** only supply ladders that are certified to EN 131 (or international equivalents);
- **Ladder Association Training Providers** conduct training in approved centres, using Ladder Association trained instructors, and only use equipment that complies to EN 131.

The Ladder Association works closely with a number of organisations to support codes of good practice, minimum standards for equipment, trained and qualified operatives and education in the work at height sector. These include the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), the British Standards Institution (BSI) and other National Standards Bodies, the Access Industry Forum (AIF) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).

The Ladder Association has spearheaded a number of hugely successful safety campaigns:

- Our ongoing **'Step Up to Safe Ladders' market surveillance campaign** to stop the sale of unsafe and potentially dangerous ladders in the UK, particularly those sold via online platforms.
- Our award-winning **'Get a Grip' initiative** which promoted a very clear message "If it's right to use a ladder, use the right ladder and get trained to use it safely";

The Ladder Association currently offers five training courses delivered through a network of audited and approved training centres:

- Ladder & Stepladder User;
- Ladder & Stepladder Inspection;
- Ladder & Stepladder Combined Use and Inspection;
- Steps & Step Stools for Users;
- Ladders for Managers.

In addition to administering the LadderCard training scheme, the Ladder Association publishes safety guidance, Code of Practice and technical notes - all free to download from our website <https://ladderassociation.org.uk>

Ladders are an everyday tool in homes and workplaces across the world, allowing millions of people to work at height quickly and easily. They're a versatile and vital piece of equipment, that can be used for a whole range of jobs.

But too many people still fall from ladders. The consequences of these falls can be life-changing, for both the injured party and their families. The Ladder Association wants everyone who climbs a ladder to come back down safely.

Working at height can be risky enough, without the additional danger of unsafe equipment.

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

- D1DEMO. What is your gender?
- D2AGE. Age
- D3DEMO. Which of the following best describes your current working situation?
- D4DEMO. Please indicate which one of the following best describes the industry of the that you currently work in.
- Q1. Have you bought any of the following pieces of equipment in the past 12 months (i.e. for home or work)?
- Q2. Have you bought a telescopic ladder in the last 3 years? By telescopic ladder we mean an extendable ladder that retracts down to a small size (typically they compact to around one third of their maximum height), making them easy to store and transport.
- Q3. Where did you buy your last telescopic ladder from?
- Q4. Did you buy your last telescopic ladder for use at...?
- Q4a. What would you call your job role?
- Q5. Did you purchase the telescopic ladder mainly for...?
- Q6. What type of activities do you use the telescopic ladder for?
- Q7_1. Price: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_2. Product reviews: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_3. Seller ratings: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_4. Product description and images: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_5. Product safety/reference to quality marks: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_6. Stock availability: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_7. Delivery time: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_8. Recommendation: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7_9. Other - please specify: What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7. Grid Summary Table - What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7. Ranked 1 - What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7. Ranked 2 - What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q7. Ranked 3 - What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?

APPENDIX 1 cont.

- Q7. Top 3 - What factors did you consider when making your decision to purchase your latest telescopic ladder?
- Q8. What - if any - checks did you carry out yourself when researching telescopic ladders to buy:
- Q9_1. It meets my needs: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q9_2. It was value for money: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q9_3. It feels safe to use: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q9_4. I would buy the product again: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q9_5. The product description matched the product I received: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q9_6. I would recommend the product to friends/family/colleagues: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q9. Grid Summary Table - On a scale of 1-5 (1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree), how much do you agree with the following statements about the last telescopic ladder you purchased?
- Q10. Have you ever had an accident using a telescopic ladder?
- Q11. Do you use/have used any type of ladder aside from telescopic ladders in your current or previous workplace?
- Q12. Have you ever had any formal ladder training?
- Q13. What type of formal ladder training did you receive?



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ladderassociation.org.uk/step-up

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