



## How to Prevent Accidents

Stay Alert | Stay Focused | Stay Safe

by Larry Miller, Owner of Larry Miller, Inc. and IWCA Director

The IWCA (International Window Cleaning Association) believes that “in an industry where one error can potentially be fatal, it is important that you and your staff have the most up-to-date training possible.” It only takes one day for you and your team to take the hands-on IWCA Safety Training session. The opportunity for one-on-one instruction as well as classroom training are both vital to learn professional-level safety practices and procedures to help keep you safe on the job.

Another resource that’s important for your safety is the OSHA/IWCA Alliance. (OSHA stands for Occupational Safety and Health Administration.) The OSHA/IWCA Alliance “was created to provide important information and tools to the window cleaning industry.” OSHA has developed a web page exclusively for members of IWCA. You’ll find links to products and programs you can use to help prevent accidents.

### **Training doesn’t end in the classroom**

After 20 years in the window cleaning business, I’ve heard all kinds of stories about unusual and unexpected things happening. And they can happen very quickly. I encourage members to share the stories you hear from other window cleaning professionals on the job so you can recognize potential problems and help avoid accidents from happening when you’re out there on the job.

#### **1) Cell phone distraction**

Do you ever get interrupted by calls on your cell phone when you’ve just arrived at the location and you’re on a tight schedule? It’s tempting to leave your phone in the truck and just get to work. But what if you’re still thinking about that request to reschedule the next job when you’re putting up your ladder?

You get up to the roof to clean three skylights and now you’re ready to climb back down. You inspect that ladder and see you forgot to secure all the locks! Now you’re “up the creek without a paddle.” What’s worse – not only can you not climb back down the ladder...you can’t call for help. Remember why? You left your cell phone in the truck.

The homeowner’s not home. No neighbors are home. You could end up stuck on the roof until the homeowner returns. (Another reason to always wear protective sunscreen when you’re working outdoors, even if it’s just a “short” job.)

#### **2) Just scraping by**

You’re indoors scraping paint off one of the windows in a warehouse. You take a quick look around. Your team is doing well, staying on schedule – but wait. Somebody new to the team is making what could be a risky move on his ladder. When you call out to warn him, the paint scraper bangs off the window frame, into your hand.

Ouch! That’s only the beginning. The accident could mean you can’t use that hand and can’t work for two months or more. What’s worse, because you own the business, you didn’t think you needed workmen’s comp like the rest of the team that works on a regular basis. So you end up not only with rehab but



paying hundreds or thousands of dollars not covered by insurance. (Another reason why window cleaning business owners should always include themselves under workers' comp even if they only rarely work "hands on.")

### 3) It Takes Two to Tango

If you do have to work by yourself, at least make sure the homeowner is around. Or if it's a commercial job, make sure that there's a business representative there to answer questions or help out. And just to be sure, always let somebody on your team know where you are. Call to check in during the day from time to time with an update and report on your

progress.

Instead of working alone, it's safer to have another member of your team working with you. Sometimes you need help moving something heavy out of the way, like furniture – especially if the homeowner is older or has a bad back. It's good practice to have someone who is professionally trained to hold a ladder safely or to help carry storm windows up and down stairs for washing and installation.

Say you're inside on the second floor of a home cleaning windows. You finish cleaning the last window on the inside, open it and step outside to the ledge to work on the outside. You carefully start to close the window, but you're starting to feel a little tired and thinking about taking a break. What's worse – "Click!" Oh, oh. The window suddenly locked by itself because you forgot and closed the window all the way. You're stuck outside. What would you do without somebody there who is prepared and ready to come to your rescue?

### Online Safety Training Now Available

One of the fastest and most convenient ways to get up to speed on professional safety training would be to look into the online training modules that IWCA provides. It's not only for someone new on your team, but also good for a refresher course – no matter how long you've been in the window cleaning business. Learn more at [www.iwca.org](http://www.iwca.org).

### 4 Steps to Ladder Safety

Falls from ladders (portable, step, straight, combination and extension) are one of the leading causes of occupational fatalities and injuries in the window cleaning industry.

- Always maintain a three-point (two hands and a foot, or two feet and a hand) contact on the ladder when climbing. Keep your body near the middle of the step and always face the ladder while climbing (see diagram).
- Ladders must be free of any slippery material on the rungs, steps or feet.
- Do not use a self-supporting ladder (e.g., step ladder) as a single ladder or in a partially closed position.
- Do not use the top step/rung of a ladder as a step/rung unless it was designed for that purpose.

For more information go online to [OSHA QUICK CARD Portable Ladder Safety](#).

