Smarter Roof Access for QSRs:

Why It's Time to Rethink Fixed Ladders

LadderPort

Introduction

Roof access isn't optional in the quick service restaurant industry. HVAC units, exhaust fans, grease ducts, and telecom equipment require regular maintenance. But how that access is designed makes a major difference in safety, operations, and long-term cost.

Fixed ladders are often specified by default. That needs to change.

This guide is for architects who design QSR buildings, and facilities managers who live with the consequences of poor access design. It outlines why fixed ladders introduce more risk than value—and presents LadderPort's ladder receiver as a proven alternative that balances security, compliance, and aesthetics.

CHAPTER 1

The Problem with Fixed Ladders

Fixed ladders seem like a simple solution, but they come with built-in risks that make them a poor fit for commercial applications—especially in QSR environments.

They're climbable 24/7. Ladder guards are easily bypassed. Technicians frequently encounter locked cages or corroded components. Worse, once installed, fixed ladders are rarely maintained or inspected. What begins as a code-compliant design often devolves into a maintenance liability and a safety hazard.

Risk Factors:

- Always accessible—even when "secured."
- Guards left unlocked or removed.
- Unauthorized climbing leads to injury, theft, or damage.
- Hard to monitor and difficult to enforce secure usage.

Fixed ladders are a static access solution in a dynamic, high-traffic environment. That mismatch drives risk and inefficiency.

CHAPTER 2

The Real-World Impact on Operations

Facility managers see the impact of poor ladder design long after the ribbon cutting. Vendors show up for routine service, only to be blocked by a locked or rusted guard. HVAC repairs get delayed. Grease containment systems overflow. Routine inspections fall behind.

When techs can't access the roof, they either walk off the job—or find unsafe workarounds.

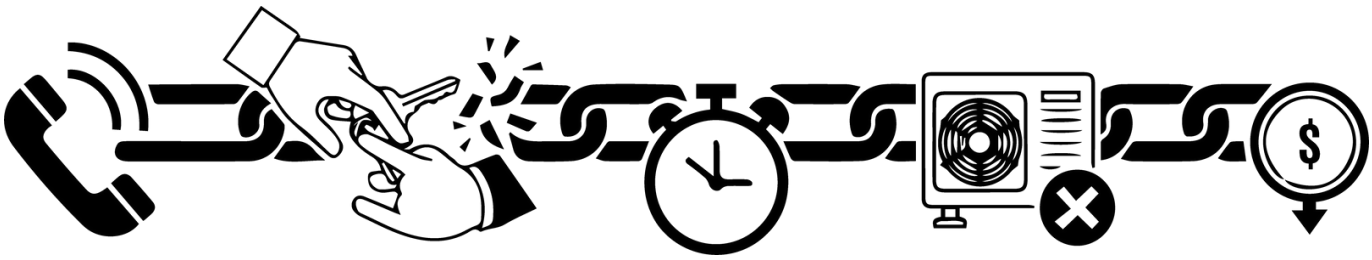
These aren't isolated issues. They happen week after week across large QSR portfolios, creating unnecessary operational drag.

Operational Breakdown:

- Vendors lack keys to guards.
- Roof access is denied or delayed.
- Technicians resort to unsafe climbing.
- Service delays impact kitchen uptime.
- Facilities teams get stuck coordinating ladder access.

Fixed ladders don't just pose a safety risk—they create workflow breakdowns that cost money and erode reliability.

What Happens When Fixed Ladder Access Fails



Service Call No Key Delayed Repair Loss of HVAC Lost Sales

CHAPTER 3

What the Data Shows

The dangers of rooftop access are backed by hard numbers.

22,710
workers suffered nonfatal ladder injuries in 2020.

Nearly 6,000
of those were in maintenance roles.

Source: *https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/fatal-injuries-from-ladders-down-in-2020-nonfatal-ladder-injuries-were-essentially-unchanged.htm*

Falls remain the leading cause of death in construction, accounting for **38.5%** of fatalities in 2023.

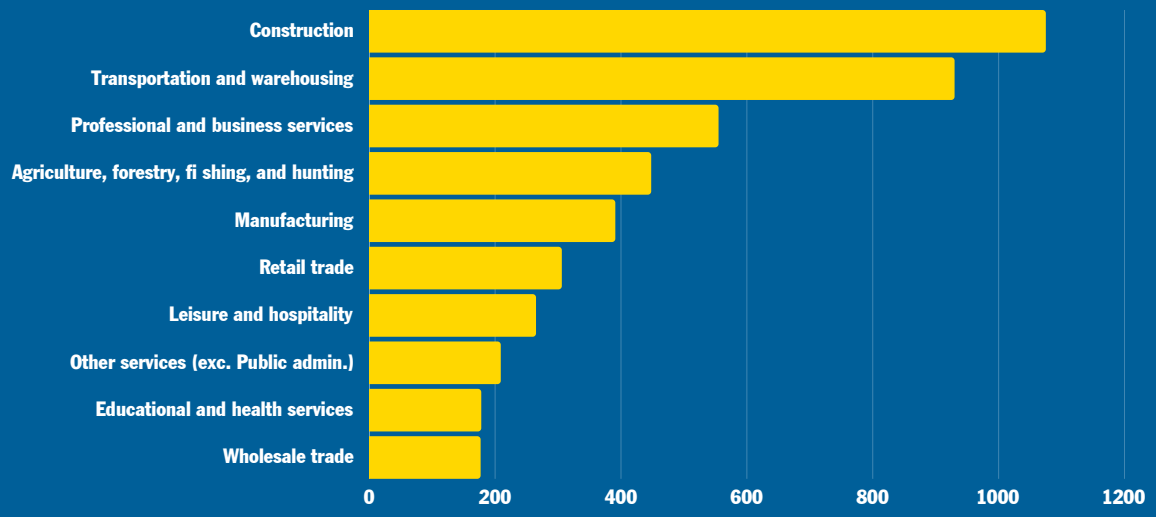
Source: *https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2025/fatal-falls-in-the-construction-industry-in-2023.htm*

The vast majority of fatal falls— **95.1%** —involve elevation.

Source: *https://www.cpwr.com/wp-content/uploads/DataBulletin-March2024.pdf*

These figures show that height remains a high-risk environment, and access systems need to reduce—not increase—that exposure.
While fixed ladders aren't the only culprits, they contribute to unnecessary fall risk when left unsecured, rusted, or uninspected.

Number and rate of fatal work injuries, by private industry sector, 2023



Source: *https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/fatal-injuries-from-ladders-down-in-2020-nonfatal-ladder-injuries-were-essentially-unchanged.htm*

CHAPTER 4

Compliance & Design Risk

Architects are expected to design for both functionality and safety. But fixed ladders frequently fall short of modern compliance standards. OSHA 1910.23 mandates specific clearance widths, inspection protocols, and fall protection systems for fixed ladders—especially those over 24 feet.

Too often, those requirements are ignored post-installation. Ladders aren't maintained. Fall arrest systems go uninspected. Or worse, designs value-engineer down to the bare minimum.

These issues don't just create exposure for facility managers. They reflect back on architects, especially when ladder-related incidents occur.

Key risks:

- Ladders degrade post-build
- Fall protection not retrofitted properly
- Guards become maintenance items
- Architects may share liability for unsafe roof access

OSHA 1910.23 Standard

OSHA 1910.23 Summary

- Fixed ladders must be capable of supporting intended loads.
- Over 24 feet requires a ladder safety system or personal fall arrest system.
- Must have clearances (minimum 7" from wall) and proper rung spacing.
- Regular inspection and maintenance is required to remain compliant.

Source: OSHA 1910.23

CHAPTER 5

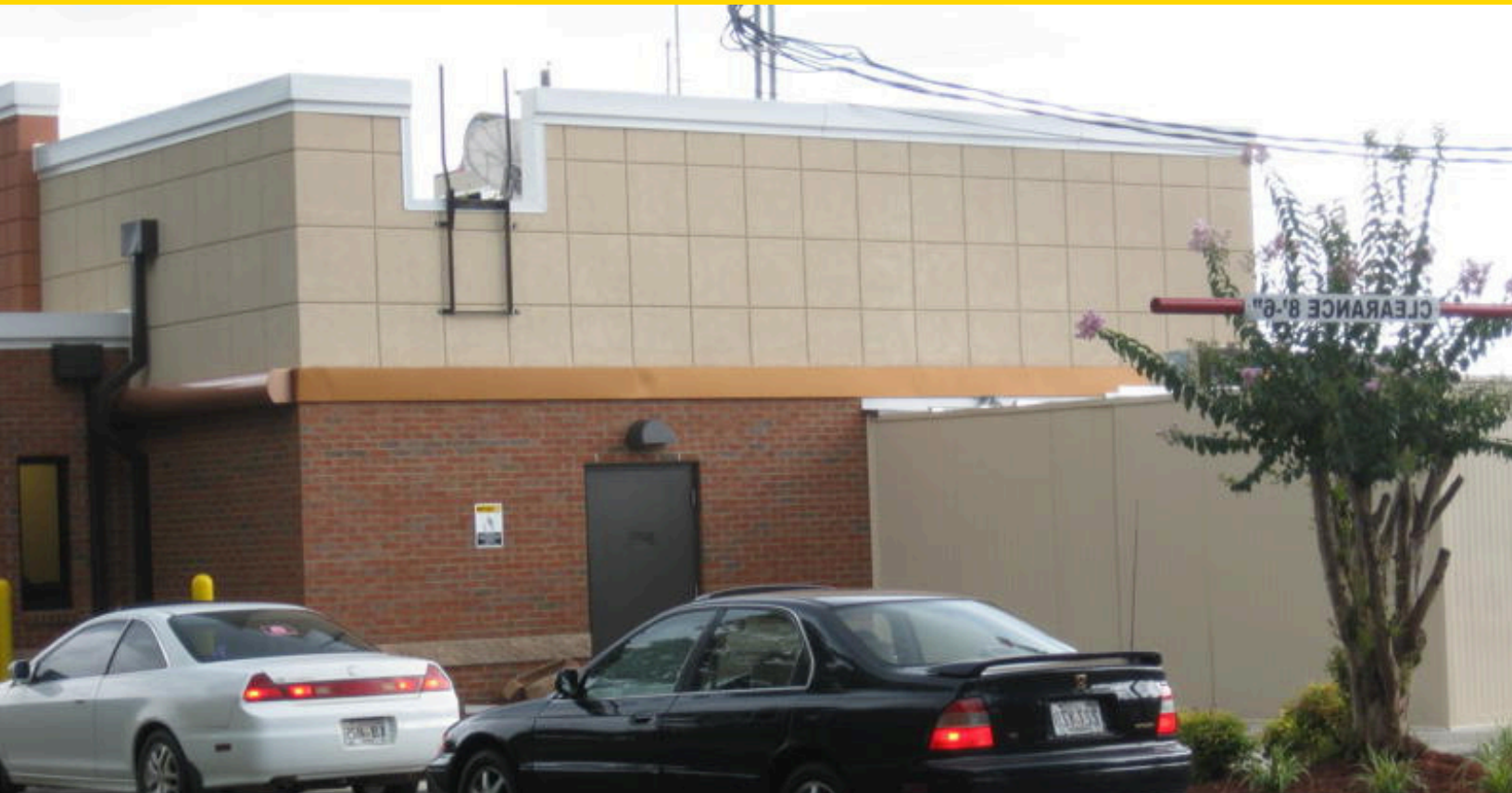
The LadderPort Alternative

LadderPort's ladder receiver system solves the core problems fixed ladders introduce. It provides a secure wall-mounted access point that accepts a portable ladder. When not in use, it's flush to the building—no exposed rungs, no climbable structure.

Technicians arrive with their own ladder, insert it into the receiver, and climb safely. When finished, the system is locked, eliminating the risk of unauthorized access.

Why It Works:

- Controlled access—no permanent climbing surface
- Weather-resistant and corrosion-proof
- Technicians and vendors appreciate safer transitions
- Minimal maintenance; nothing to inspect or grease
- Blends with building envelope—no branding interference



CHAPTER 6

Trusted by Wendy’s

Real facilities teams are moving away from fixed ladders. Here’s what one national chain is doing:

> "We are in the process of retrofitting our entire portfolio of company-owned restaurants with LadderPort's Ladder Receivers. We have also changed our new store drawing to include the Ladder Receivers in the design specifications. Our technicians and vendors really appreciate our investment in their safety and how much more secure they feel making that precarious transition from their ladder to the roof deck."
>
> — **John Getha,** Director of Facilities, Wendy's International

This kind of shift doesn’t happen unless the system works.

CHAPTER 7

What to Specify Instead

Architects don't need to guess. Here's how to specify a safer, modern roof access system:

Spec Guidance:

- Eliminate fixed exterior ladders from all designs
- Install LadderPort wall-mounted receiver at grade
- Require vendor-supplied portable ladder with locking feet
- Flash receiver to building envelope to maintain integrity

SAFER ACCESS IS SMARTER DESIGN

Fixed ladders are no longer the default. Safer, more secure alternatives exist. Architects who continue to spec them risk creating operational headaches, safety liabilities, and long-term compliance issues.

LadderPort's ladder receiver is a smarter, proven alternative—backed by data and deployed by major QSR brands.

NEED HELP REVIEWING YOUR ACCESS DESIGN?

Let's talk

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