

Pull-Down Attic Stair Safety

Pull-down attic stairs are used to make access to the attic space more convenient. In newer homes with no HVAC equipment in the attic, it is more common to see a scuttle access, which requires a ladder.

Proper installation of these pull-down stairs is crucial to the safety of anyone using these stairs. Improper installation and maintenance of these stair systems can lead to catastrophic failure, and serious injury or death.

Common installation mistakes

- Using drywall screws to fasten the stairs
- Using finish nails to fasten the stairs
- Not cutting stiles to the proper length (too long or too short)

Common maintenance issues

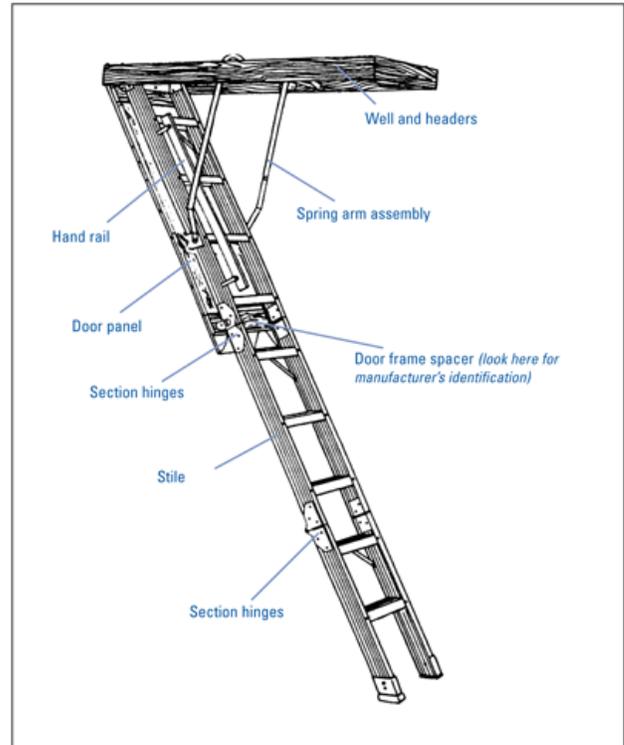
- Broken or missing spring arm assemblies
- Loose bolts
- Cracked treads
- Bent or damaged section hinges

When we inspect a pull-down attic stair, we examine all of the components of the stair carefully before choosing to climb it. If we find defects in the installation or maintenance of the stair, we will label it a safety hazard and will recommend its repair or replacement.

Some issues cannot be safely repaired, such as missing or broken spring arm assemblies or section hinges, and will require replacement of the entire stair assembly.

Safe stair usage

- Inspect the stairs carefully every time they are used.
- Be aware of weight limits on stair assemblies; there should be a manufacturer's label on the frame indicating the capacity.
- Ascend and descend facing the stairs.
- Only one person at a time should be on the stairs. Others should stand clear.



Components of a pull-down attic stair



Manufacturers' installation instructions are often completely disregarded

The following is an excerpt from manufacturer's installation manual. Most installation instructions carry similar warnings.

WARNINGS

ATTENTION: INSTALLERS AND/OR USERS. Failure to heed all of these warnings could result in severe bodily injury. Separate and complete installation instructions are/were provided with this stair. Before installation, verify that this product and its installation meet all applicable building codes. FOLLOW ALL OF THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. PLEASE CALL THE FACTORY IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.

INSTALLERS: Stair is ready for installation. DO NOT DISASSEMBLE TO INSTALL.
1 - This stair designed for RESIDENTIAL USE ONLY. Commercial or business use is strictly prohibited.

2 - Do not attempt to open or unfold the stair before it is installed in the rough opening. Tension on the springs could cause the unit to snap back if opened before frame is secured.

3 - Specific models of 8'5", 8'9" and 10'3" are provided for different ceiling heights. Use only the proper length stair required for your installation determined by use of the instructions and measurements.

4 - Stair is never to be installed or used where ceiling height exceeds 10'3". Do not attempt to extend the length of stair in any way or by use of any additional device.

5 - Secure stair in ceiling opening permanently by use of sixteen separate 16d nails or 1/4 X 3" lag screws as instructed. Refer to instructions for proper placement of these nails or screws. Use of other fasteners such as finish nails, staples, sheet rock or deck type screws can cause sudden, catastrophic failure, and should never be used.

6 - Cut off feet of stair in accordance with instructions. Make certain there are no "gaps" between sections when stair is fully extended. It is very important that all three sections of the stair extend in a completely straight and rigid line.

7 - From time of stairway installation and throughout the entire lifetime of the stair, regularly check that all nuts and bolts are in place and are always kept tight. The 3/8" lock nuts holding the spring arms to the stairway must be kept tight at all times.