

## Attic pull down ladders

Tales from the Crawlspace  
By Propertyexam

Attic pull-down ladders, also called attic pull-down stairways, are collapsible ladders that are permanently attached to the attic floor. Occupants can use these ladders to access their attics without being required to carry a portable ladder.

### **Common Defects**

Homeowners, not professional carpenters, usually install attic pull-down ladders. Evidence of this distinction can be observed in consistently shoddy and dangerous work that rarely meets safety standards. Some of the more common defective conditions observed by inspectors include:

- cut bottom cord of structural truss. Often, homeowners will cut through a structural member in the field while installing a pull-down ladder, unknowingly weakening the structure. Structural members should not be modified in the field without an engineer's approval;
- fastened with improper nails or screws. Homeowners often use drywall or deck screws rather than the standard 16d penny nails or 1/4" x 3" lag screws. Nails and screws that are intended for other purposes may have reduced shear



- strength and they may not support pull-down ladders;
- fastened with an insufficient number of nails or screws. Manufacturers provide a certain number of nails with instructions that they all be used, and they probably do this for a good reason. Inspectors should be wary of “place nail here” notices that are nowhere near any nails;
  - lack of insulation. Hatches in many houses (especially older ones) are not likely to be weather-stripped and/or insulated. An uninsulated attic hatch allows air from the attic to flow freely into the home, which may cause the heating or cooling system to run overtime. An attic hatch cover box can be installed to increase energy savings;
  - loose mounting bolts. This condition is more often caused by age rather than installation, although improper installation will hasten the loosening process;
  - attic pull-down ladders are cut too short. Stairs should reach the floor;
  - attic pull-down ladders are cut too long. This causes pressure at the folding hinge, which can cause breakage;
  - improper or missing fasteners;
  - compromised fire barrier when installed in the garage;
  - attic ladder frame is not properly secured to the ceiling opening;
  - closed ladder is covered with debris, such as blown insulation or roofing material shed during roof work. Inspectors can place a sheet on the floor beneath the ladder to catch whatever debris may fall onto the floor; and
  - cracked steps. This defect is a problem with wooden ladders.
  - In sliding pull-down ladders, there is a potential for the ladder to slide down quickly without notice. Always pull the ladder down slowly and cautiously.