



Fall from Indoor Rock Climbing Wall

INCIDENT

A 13 year old girl on a school trip, fell 8.8m while top rope rock climbing at an indoor climbing wall. She badly fractured her ankle and cracked her pelvis.

CIRCUMSTANCES

The injured climber had completed the climb and was being lowered off the wall by a classmate. Unfortunately the belayer had not pulled the rope through the petzl grigri belay device. This meant there was 8.8m of live uncontrolled rope sitting on the floor. The climber was therefore unrestrained and plummeted to the floor.

INVESTIGATION

The investigation identified the school group lesson was inadequate and did not include the requirement for each pair to demonstrate belaying competency to the instructors, before using the wall without direct supervision. The belayer had no previous experience and did not understand the group lesson. The figure of eight knot was taught and this overshadowed the importance of understanding the belay technique.

SOLUTION

The climbing wall has since introduced a successful system where all clients are taught in a designated teaching zone. A white tag is clipped onto the back of the harness and only removed once they have demonstrated belaying competence. The double karabiner clip on method, has now replaced the figure of eight knot for School groups.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ADVICE

There have been a number of serious accidents and near misses on climbing walls due to incorrect belaying.

The Department advises that climbing wall managers:

- ensure beginner climbers are properly instructed in belay procedures
- ensure climbers demonstrate belay competence before climbing
- ensure constant supervision of the climbing wall
- review safety procedures and ensure they meet minimum standards
- ensure lead instructors hold NZOIA qualifications suitable for climbing walls.

Guidance on minimum safety standards and instructor qualifications can be found at www.nzoi.org.nz, www.sparc.org.nz/education/outdoor-activities-guidelines-for-leaders and WorkCover NSW *Health and Safety*



for Artificial Climbing Structures and Operations. www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/Publications/OHS/SafetyGuides/pages/artificialclimbingstructuresandoperation.aspx
AS 2316.1 – 2009 *Artificial Climbing Structures and Challenge Courses*.

WHICH INDUSTRIES/SECTORS OR MATTERS WILL THIS INFORMATION BE RELEVANT TO?

- All indoor climbing wall owners managers
- New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association NZOIA
- Ministry of Education (Education Outside the Classroom)

Note: This material has been prepared using the best information available to the Department of Labour at the time of publication. Information may change over time and it may be necessary for you to obtain an update. This material is also only intended to provide general advice and does not constitute legal advice. You should make your own judgement about action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with your workplace health and safety obligations under the law.