



# Risk Management Considerations for Climbing Walls

## What Are Climbing Wall's & Where Are They Found

Climbing walls are specially designed structures that allow people to climb upward, horizontally and onto overhanging walls by using their hands and/or feet on holds that are projecting away from the surface of the wall.

Rock climbing walls can be fixed or mobile and found in climbing clubs, amusement parks, carnivals, schools and fitness and community centres. The popularity of this activity has increased dramatically over the last number of years and so have the associated hazards.

## Liability Insurance

Climbing wall owners need to have a sufficient amount of liability insurance to ensure to protect themselves in the event of an injury.

## Waivers and Hold Harmless Agreements

Liability, parental waivers and hold harmless agreements should be reviewed by a Lawyer specializing in these activities. This will ensure that the owner and the staff members are adequately protected. The waivers should be signed and dated before any climber is allowed to enter the climbing area and use the equipment. In addition, the waiver and hold harmless agreement should describe in detail the apparent hazards that are associated with climbing and climbing walls.

Waivers and hold harmless agreements should be updated as required for any changes to the operation or location of the activity. Many of the climbing associations can provide examples of waivers or hold harmless agreements.

## Records

Records should be kept and retained for all staff members including their resumes, their training certificates, their dates for recertification and all other pertinent documentation that may be required to show evidence of their qualifications. In addition all receipts, invoices and certificates should be retained for any and all installations, maintenance and any safety or climbing equipment purchases.

## Training and Supervision

All staff involved in climbing, coaching or fitting of personal protective equipment must be a certified instructor. To gain certification, the person is required to complete training through one of the various accredited associations. These associations generally require the person to be a certain age, have an up to date First Aid and CPR certificate and have a certain level of climbing experience. They must also have completed the required technical and climbing exams. Recertification of the instructors is required on a regular basis.

## Personal Protective Equipment

All personal protective equipment should be inspected before and after every use and tested as per the manufacturers recommendations.

- Minimum and maximum climber height and weight limitations should be established and followed as per the manufacturers recommendations.
- Harnesses should be checked before and after each use for tears, fraying and all buckles and fasteners for signs of deterioration or cracking.
- Various size helmets should be available with the appropriate fastening equipment in place. Helmets should be checked and cleaned before and after each use.
- Ropes should be inspected regularly for wear, fraying and tears or cuts.
- Auto belay devices should be tested and inspected before and after each use to ensure they are operating properly and can support the weight of the climber.
- Emergency medical equipment should be available in the event of an injury.

## Hazards and Safeguards

There are many inherent risks associated with climbing and climbing walls. Climbers must be willing to accept some of these risks before climbing. Some of the risks can never be completely eliminated from this activity. Ongoing risk assessments and preventative measures should be in place and utilized at all times to help mitigate these hazards. Preventative measures should include regular safety checks of the entire climbing area including wall condition, holds and ropes and the regular inspection of all safety and climbing equipment.

### Hazards can include:

- The risk of falling and hitting the climbing wall. Instructors must be properly trained on how to support climbers utilizing the guide ropes.
- The personal protective equipment must be regularly inspected, maintained and upgraded as required. Staff must be properly trained in the fitting of harnesses and helmets.
- It is the owners responsibility to ensure all staff members have the required training and adequate supervision is always provided to ensure the safety of the users, spectators and staff.

- Ensure all climbers have removed loose jewelry, objects from their pockets and anything attached to their belts or clothing. This will help to ensure persons below are not hit with foreign objects causing injury.
- Loose clothing should be removed, tight fitting clothing is appropriate for climbers and any climbers with long hair should have it tied back to ensure it does not become entangled on the climbing or safety equipment.
- Staff should be trained in first aid, CPR and a well defined emergency response plan should be in place to care for climbers or spectators that may be injured until emergency services arrives.
- Rescue procedures should be established and implemented to deal with climbers who may be injured and suspended in the air or have frozen and cannot descend on their own.
- The padding on the deck surface should be inspected regularly. It should slope or provide a ramp onto the padding if possible. Consult the manufacturer for recommended padding area surface coverage.
- Staff must ensure the climbing area is well controlled through the use of fencing, ropes or other means. Spectators should be well separated from the climbing wall, climbers and the staff during operation. Having an appropriate number of staff present at all times will assist in controlling this issue. Have at least one staff member in place to control the spectators and the climbers waiting. Another staff member can fit and assist users with putting on safety equipment and at least one staff member to assist and coach the climber. Certain climbing activities and the experience of the climbers may alter these recommendations for staffing.
- Staff must regularly inspect all holds prior to use and periodically throughout the day.
- Adequate lighting is required for all climbers, the instructors and the climbing equipment.
- Control access to the climbing wall during off hours. Ensure there is no unsupervised climbing and access to the wall is controlled by safety devices during off hours.
- Outdoor climbing walls involve different hazards. The weather should be constantly monitored and ensure appropriate methods are used to monitor the weather especially including the wind and lightning which can present hazards to the climbers. The ground surface

should also be inspected to ensure the climbing wall is stable and level. Inspect the entire climbing area for overhead hazards including wiring, trees and other objects that may be within reach, obstruct or impair the climber.

- A procedure should be in place for screening users for prior health issues or substance abuse prior to allowing them to use the climbing wall.
- A formal procedure should be in place for describing and pointing out the inherent risks before the climber starts using the wall.