



CLIMBING WALL ASSOCIATION

Lines: The CWA Newsletter

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Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

Happy Thanksgiving from Lines, the Climbing Wall Association newsletter. You will find articles about the Climbing Wall Summit, our insurance program, and other information in this issue. We have also included a new feature -- a member spotlight. If you would like to see your facility highlighted in the newsletter -- drop us a line, we'll include your organization next time.

If you have not checked out the Climbing Wall Summit and Managers' Symposium web site, you should take a look. We have been updating the web site with information on workshop offerings and other events as it arrives. Current CWA members will get a significant discount on Summit registration -- and the first registration deadline will be here before you know it.

Finally, if you are not a member, please consider joining the CWA today. We are working on your behalf every day — safeguarding climbing industry insurability, lobbying on your behalf, educating state regulators, and watching your back. If your membership has lapsed, please take a moment to renew today. You can join or renew here: www.climbingwallindustry.org/membership.php. Remember, together we're stronger!

Best Regards,

Bill Zimmermann,
Executive Director

Climbing Wall Summit & Managers' Symposium Early Bird Registration Deadline

Remember not to miss the first ever Climbing Wall Summit and Manager's Symposium! Register by December 31st and receive "early bird" rates. The Summit, on April 12- 14, 2007 will be held in Boulder, Colorado, offering classes, clinics, workshops and focused networking on many aspects of management and operation of manufactured climbing walls. If you want to learn more, check out the web site www.climbingwallindustry.org/cwsmain.php.

While some great workshops have already been scheduled; we have extended the deadline for the call for workshop proposals. Do you have a knack for teaching? Do you have valuable information or some successful strategies to share? Then you should fill out a workshop proposal, which you can download from the site, and send us your ideas.

Summit Workshops will include:

- Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Route Setting, Charlie Boas, Boulder Rock Club.
- Risk Management 101, Bill Zimmermann, Climbing Wall Association.
- Negligence and Its Defenses, Charles "Reb" Gregg, Esq.
- Legal Responsibilities of Dealing with Minors, Charles "Reb" Gregg, Esq.
- Managing Your Route Setting Program, Dan Hague, Climbing Wall Management, Inc.
- Basic Movement Instruction, Dan Hague, Climbing Wall Management, Inc.
- Climbing Wall Business Information Systems, Gloria Hardwick, Vertical Relief Enterprises, Inc.
- Standards for Climbing Gear, Jesse Mattner, C.A.M.P. U.S.A.
- Climbing Into Curriculum, National Physical Education Standards and Your Climbing Program, Leahy & Associates.
- Roundtable Discussion -- Best Practices for Fixed Belay Systems.

Government Affairs Update

The CWA has been negotiating with the Massachusetts Department of Public Safety regarding the regulation of climbing facilities in the Commonwealth. We recently accomplished a number of breakthroughs with the DPS, securing a separate section of regulations specifically tailored to the unique needs of recreational climbing facilities, ensuring that industry professionals can be certified inspectors in Massachusetts, and have successfully challenged proposed regulations that were detrimental to our members. Bill Zimmermann of the CWA will be meeting with DPS officials in Boston on November 28th to continue discussions.

The Kentucky Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee met on Tuesday, October, 2006. The subcommittee reviewed administrative regulations including 302 KAR 16:020 which addresses operation of amusement rides or amusement attractions. A motion was made, seconded, and approved to amend Section 2 to specify that amusement attractions shall not include manually belayed climbing walls.

We have also been contacted by the states of New Jersey and North Carolina regarding the regulation of climbing facilities in those states. Both New Jersey and North Carolina appear to be in the process of revising administrative regulations relating to climbing facilities.

Creating A "Culture of Safety"

A version of this article was recently featured in Perspectives, The Professional Journal of the YMCA

The first indoor rock gym in the United States, the Vertical Club in Seattle, was a place for mountaineers and rock climbers to train in the off season. The technology was not very advanced back then, but showed a lot of imagination and ingenuity.

The climbing holds were made out of real rock and were glued to painted plywood panels. The paint had some sand mixed into it to provide some texture. Climbers used the rock holds to climb the walls. The facility was a new idea, at least in North America, but the rest of the equipment and the techniques employed were familiar to the climbers: climbing shoes, harnesses, carabiners, belay devices, climbing ropes, and belay systems. Then, the members were climbers.

Fast forward almost twenty years and a lot has changed: we now have an indoor climbing industry with professional firms designing and building manufactured climbing walls full time, companies fabricating hand holds, and companies designing and installing custom padded flooring.

We also have a wide range of climbing venues: purpose built climbing facilities, multi-purpose sports and recreation facilities with manufactured walls, bouldering features installed indoors and outdoors, even portable climbing walls. The indoor climbing concept, while controversial to some at first, definitely took off. The initial concept grew, changed, and diversified in ways that many of the early developers and adopters never even imagined.

Two fundamental things have changed since the days of the Vertical Club: the technology used in designing, building, and operating these facilities; and the clientele. The technology advances year by year: new and innovative climbing equipment; improvements in existing climbing equipment; and better, more realistic looking wall designs. The clientele has also changed: climbing facilities are no longer the exclusive preserve of climbers - this has some implications for the sport which I'll discuss later.

Indoor climbing has introduced the sport to thousands who may have never climbed outdoors. According to the Outdoor Industry Foundation's Outdoor Recreation Participation Study "growth in individual activities is focused on activities that 'can be done in a day.'" Activities that are time consuming, commitment heavy (like backpacking), or require a lot of specialized equipment tend to be on the decline. Indoor climbing has a lot of favorable characteristics for growth: it is a new twist on an old activity, access is easy, it doesn't take a lot of equipment (for the participant at least), and it is relatively easy to learn the basic skills. The participation data now indicate more outings for indoor climbing than for climbing outdoors!

What does all this mean? Well it means, in some respects, the indoor climbing industry is a victim of its own success and we need to manage a new sport, in a new environment, with a new type of clientele. As people new to climbing are introduced to the sport, new expectations, attitudes, and norms emerge. If you were to walk up and ask someone at the Vertical Club in 1987 if climbing was "safe" you would probably have gotten the answer "of course climbing is not 'safe.'" The point of reference for the climber then was climbing in the mountain environment where the weather was unpredictable, the terrain changeable, and where there were many inherent risks. If you were to walk into a climbing facility today and ask someone "is climbing is 'safe'" you're much more likely to get the answer "sure, climbing is reasonably safe."

What's changed? Not the risks. If you climb you can fall, if you fall you can get hurt - so the same risks are still present - although the range of risks involved in climbing indoors is much smaller than for climbing outdoors. Some of the things that have changed are: the climbers' point of reference, the climbers' sense of the environment, the climbers' sense of the sport, and the climbers themselves. Many people that climb today were introduced to the sport indoors and may have never climbed outdoors: new clientele means different backgrounds, different perspectives, different expectations, and different values regarding risk taking, personal responsibility, and safety. Now, members are members, not necessarily climbers.

So what are you to do if you want to develop a "culture of safety" around your climbing program or facility? I'll focus on just a few fundamental concepts: personal responsibility, competency, qualified instruction, and good tools.

Personal Responsibility

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to honor the traditions of the sport by sharing the values of healthy risk taking and personal responsibility. Do a good job of sharing good information about the sport of climbing.

You should communicate that climbing has risks, takes personal responsibility, and offers rewards. Climbing has all three: risk, responsibility, and reward - you can't accept one without accepting the others. If you have members that can't accept the risks of climbing - then they shouldn't climb. If you

have members that can't take personal responsibility for their own well-being or that of others - then they shouldn't climb.

Informing your members about the nature and traditions of the sport, and the values necessary for success will help your members to understand what it is they are really doing, and how they might grow through participating in the sport. Developing the climbers' ethic of personal responsibility for safety is, in my opinion, the key component.

Competency

The sport of climbing has a long tradition of teaching and learning through mentoring and apprenticeship. In years past, one learned how to climb from experienced climbers such as professional mountain guides, or even through organized programs such as NOLS and Outward Bound. Many still learn to climb from guides and through these types of programs. The guides and instructors providing climbing instruction often had extensive personal experience, had acquired a great deal of knowledge and skill, and had developed sound judgment over time. In short, climbers learned from experts.

The proliferation of advanced equipment, improved climbing techniques, easy access to indoor climbing venues, and instruction in basic climbing and belaying techniques has made climbing accessible to many more people. New climbers, for example, can complete a structured "belay school" curriculum and be taught how to belay in one to three hours. (This does not mean that new climbers are competent to belay without direct supervision). New climbers are now able to develop the ability to ascend very difficult climbs very rapidly through intensive and repetitive indoor training. However, these new climbers may lack the knowledge, breadth of experience, and good judgment that builds a solid foundation to be a successful climber or mountaineer in the traditional sense.

In some ways, climbers introduced to the sport through indoor climbing may know a lot about a little. They may know how to use one belay device, they may know how to tie one or two knots, they may know one belay technique, and they may be very accomplished in moving over vertical or overhanging terrain. But they might not know what they don't know!

In other words, the skills developed in an indoor climbing environment might develop an accomplished but highly specialized climber - a climber that might not understand the limits to his or her knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment. A climber trained indoors may or may not have all of the skills necessary to climb safely outdoors - unless the transition from indoor climbing instruction to outdoor climbing instruction has been made thoughtfully and intentionally.

The climber must be taught to understand the need to seek competent instruction and the need to become a life-long learner. Another piece in developing a "culture of safety" is to establish the norm that "there are no dumb questions." You should reinforce curiosity, inquiry, and questioning. You should be worried if members are apprehensive about asking any of their questions. If you are teaching

climbing in a recreational setting, you would like to make sure that all of the questions have been asked and that all of the answers have been understood.

Therefore, another important pillar of climbing safety is competence or mastery. Owners and managers must insist on the absolute need to deliver competent climbing instruction. They must find, or be willing to develop, and keep, expert climbing instructors. Climbing instructors should in turn, insist on the need for competence or mastery of climbing and belaying skills on the part of their students, and for students to develop the intellectual habits of curiosity, inquiry and critical thinking. These are high expectations, but there really is no alternative.

Good Tools

One of the most important tools in an indoor climbing program is the climbing structure itself. The design, engineering, and construction of manufactured climbing walls have become highly specialized, with industry specific standards, methods, materials, and building techniques. There are a number of vendors across the country today that specialize in building only climbing walls. If you are considering building a climbing wall, find a vendor with experience, good references, and who is pleasant to work with.

Climbing equipment is a critical component in the climbing safety equation. The good news is that modern climbing equipment is designed, engineered, and manufactured to be extraordinarily reliable. Climbing equipment manufacturing is highly specialized and subject to rigorous quality control measures. Climbing equipment "failure" is very, very uncommon. Reports of climbing equipment "failure" are frequently inaccurate and can usually be traced back to some form of "operator error" or to improper care or use. So, the first rule of climbing equipment is: use all climbing equipment in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Climbing equipment must be selected, cared for, maintained, stored, inspected, and used properly in order for it to do you any good.

The most unreliable link in the climbing equipment "safety chain" is the climber. This brings us right back to, you guessed it, developing a "culture of safety." Manufacturers and distributors sometimes find that their climbing gear is used incorrectly or for things it was not designed to do - even by experienced climbers. We must insist on respect for the equipment - it must be treated as if life depends upon it because it does. We must also insist on its proper use which includes using the right tool for the job, proper care, pre-use inspection and retirement when there is any doubt whatsoever about the integrity of the equipment. Managing human behavior in regard to equipment and techniques that become familiar and routine requires constant vigilance.

Conclusion

Developing a culture of safety may sound like an onerous task. But it can be done if an organization is committed to the goal, and intentional about promoting specific values such as: personal responsibility; competency; inquiry; life-long learning; and open mindedness. Climbing is a sport that requires the

climber's full attention. Likewise, managing a climbing program is a sport that requires the manager's full attention - give your climbing programs the resources and attention they deserve. Climbing is a wonderful and wonderfully rewarding sport that can be continued for a lifetime - if we acquire the right knowledge, the proper skills, and develop good judgment over time.

The Challenge of Insurance — Insurers' Profitability Drops

by Bret Van Leeuwen,
Stratus Insurance Services

I don't believe we need to any shed tears for the insurance industry, but it's surprising to most people that the goal for insurance companies is to pay \$1.00 in claims and expenses for every \$1.00 they receive in insurance premiums. It's true that a 100% payout ratio (losses + expenses) is what most carriers aspire to achieve. If the ratios go above these levels, premiums typically increase with the increases in losses and expenses. If they go below these levels, rates decrease. It's pretty simple math when viewed this way.

Insurance companies make their money on the use of premium dollars over time, through investment vehicles like stocks, bonds, real estate, etc. Insurance companies use your premium dollars more for their investment potential than for paying claims. The U.S. property/casualty insurance industry's net income after taxes fell 9.3 percent in first-half 2006 as investment results deteriorated. Reflecting the decline in net income after taxes, the industry's annualized rate of return on average surplus (net worth) fell to 13 percent in first-half 2006 from 15.6 percent in first-half 2005, according to ISO and the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America (PCI).

There was a \$900,000,000 decline in the first half of the year in net income from previous year. Realized capital gains on investments tumbled 66.4 percent to \$0.9 billion in first-half 2006 from \$2.6 billion in first-half 2005. Combining net investment income and realized capital gains, overall net investment gains fell 9.3 percent to \$25.4 billion through first-half 2006 from \$28 billion through first-half 2005. The figures are consolidated estimates for all private property/casualty insurers based on reports accounting for at least 96 percent of all business written by private U.S. property/casualty insurers.

So, in following the recent downturn of profits for the insurance industry, here is a recent update... CWA group premiums are NOT GOING TO BE AFFECTED! Even though the industry lost money in the first half of 2006, the insurance program that combines all of us into a powerful group pool is clearly demonstrating why it's great to be part of this program.

There are no other programs insuring climbing walls that have maintained the consistent presence and price stability as The Climbing Wall Association's over the past several years. Think about that when a new insurance company wants to lure you away. Consider long term presence and stability, knowledge

of your industry, claims handling services, and possible cancellation if you make a claim with another insurer. Your programs were negotiated for you by your Association, specifically for you, with a view for long term insurability and industry stability.

An Accident Involving a Sharp-edged Quick-clip

From Berg und Steigen, 3, 2006, pg 12

<http://www.bergundsteigen.at/>

Translated with the permission of the author by Dave Custer,
American Alpine Club & Alpine Club Canada UIAA Safety Commission Delegate

On June 2nd, 2006, a severe accident occurred at a Cologne, Germany, climbing gym. By placement of the rope in the quick clip and the subsequent lower-off, the rope was severed. The resulting investigation showed that the rope was cut by the sharp edge of the quick-clip. Further testing by the German Alpine Club Safety Committee suggests that this incident was not specific to a single instance of an unusually sharp edged quick-clip, but rather that this model of quick-clip is characterized by a similarly sharp edge.

In the accident, the rope was not correctly placed in the quick-clips; instead, the rope was inadvertently placed in the notch in the nose of the quick-clip where it was held in place by the wire-gate. The quick-clip geometry and the size of the quick-clip nose caused the weighted rope to run through the quick-clip nose-notch. The sharp edges of the nose-notch finally led to the severing of the rope. We ask all climbing establishments to check quick-clips manufactured by Fixe. Should the quick-clips exhibit sharp edges and the nose permit the constraint of rope in the nose notch, we recommend replacing the quick-clips... We ask climbers to pay careful attention when clipping to insure that the rope lies correctly in the quick-clip and is not caught between the gate and the nose-notch as shown in the photo.

Chris Semmel, German Alpine Club Safety Committee

The opinion of the Austrian Alpine Club:

For many years, we have offered this model of steel quick-clip from Fixe as it is especially suited for lowering off of half rope-length pitches. The unfortunate accident described above is to our knowledge unique. In part due to the freak nature of the incident and in part due to the situation, which involved a user error that is easily recognized as incorrect usage even by a novice climber, no recall is recommended. We will continue to offer this quick-clip. It is reasonable for the climber to be responsible for the correct placement the rope in quick-clips before lowering. We recommend that the manufacturer remedy this flaw in future production.

Austrian Alpine Club, Department of Mountain Sports.

Member Spotlight — Boston Rock Gym

CWA member Boston Rock Gym is now under new management. Owner Chris O'Connell and his team hope to bring you some great new changes, while keeping everything you love about BRG. Since first opening their doors in 1989, the Boston Rock gym has become one of the premier indoor climbing facilities in the country. With over 40 routes, a lead roof, and bouldering cave; the BRG has the terrain to satisfy any climbing enthusiast. The BRG offers lessons, clinics, and special events year round. People of all ages, and all climbing abilities, come to the Boston Rock Gym to test their skill on routes varying from 5.4 to 5.13 plus. If you haven't visited the BRG yet, stop in next time you are in Boston!

About the Climbing Wall Association, Inc. (CWA). The CWA is a 501(c)(06), non-profit, trade association incorporated in May of 2003 for manufacturers of climbing wall equipment, builders of climbing walls, operators of climbing walls, and others involved in the climbing industry.

The CWA is the only trade association addressing the needs and interests of the climbing wall industry and climbing wall operators. The mission of the Climbing Wall Association is to support the growth, health and independence of the climbing wall industry, and to promote the sport of climbing.