



2009 CIVILIAN  
CLIMBING WALL ASSOCIATION

# Lines: The CWA Newsletter

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**July 7, 2009**

## Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

Summer has finally arrived in Boulder after a wet, cool spring. The old timers tell me this is the way Colorado summers used to be before a long string of near-drought and drought years. The meadows and wildflowers in the high country are stunning, and brown season has not arrived yet and may not. The burn area from this winter's fast moving grass fire, which we can see from our office, is as green as Ireland today.

In other green news, we are all eagerly anticipating the opening of Boulder's newest, greenest climbing gym -- Movement Climbing and Fitness. The grand opening is scheduled for July 25th. We cannot wait to introduce you to the completed facility next year at the 2010 Climbing Wall Summit. We have tentative dates for the Summit and will be making an official announcement shortly, for now mark your calendars for May 13 to 16, 2010.

Finally, tragically, the climbing community lost some outstanding climbers recently. Jonny Copp, Micah Dash, and Wade Johnson were killed in an avalanche in China attempting a new route on Mt. Edgar. We also learned that legendary climber John Bachar died in a fall Sunday at Dike Wall near Mammoth Lakes. Our sincere condolences go out to the friends and family of these accomplished climbers.

Wherever your adventures take you, please take care.

Sincerely,

Bill Zimmermann,  
Executive Director

## Remembering our climbers

Many in the climbing community are mourning the loss of Jonny Copp, Micah Dash and Wade Johnson. According to reports, the three were climbing in southwestern China on Mount Edgar when they were struck by an avalanche. Copp and Dash, both of Boulder, were attempting to establish a new route on the steep, 21,000-foot peak. Johnson, of Arden Hills, Minnesota, was filming the crew on behalf of Sender Films.

The bodies of Copp and Johnson have both been recovered while efforts to locate Dash were thwarted by bad weather. A future search may be possible after the monsoon season ends.

The CWA extends its deepest sympathies to the friends and families of these extraordinary climbers. When one climber is lost, we all feel the void. Please help by donating to the memorial fund.

A memorial service for the three climbers is planned for July 11, here in Boulder. For more information, please visit [adventurefilm.org](http://adventurefilm.org).

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## Building Bridges for Bouldering

By: Chris Danielson; Thread Climbing Consultation

In recent years, the climbing wall industry has seen an increase in the percentage of dedicated bouldering terrain in climbing facilities. Since last summer at least four commercial bouldering-centric gyms have been built in North America, and many other full-service climbing facilities have been built with more significant bouldering than would have been designed a decade ago. The terrain itself is getting bolder as well, with more and higher "top-out" walls. It is exciting growth for this aspect of the sport but the bouldering boom indoors is not without challenges.

Bouldering has an image problem.

Depending on where you are and who you ask bouldering is different things. For example, at a climbing gym's front desk, you might hear: "Bouldering is much simpler to get into than roped climbing - it's cheaper, easy to try, you don't need to take an instructional class, and you can do it by yourself or with a larger group of friends." But at the same desk from a different person, you might hear: "Bouldering can be pretty intimidating. It requires a lot more strength to get into than roped climbing and the grades generally start with the difficult range of intermediate level sport climbs. You can try bouldering, but if you're going to get into climbing, you might start by taking a top-rope class." Naturally, bouldering will be more appealing to some people than others, but it does not help the highest percentage of customers or the gym itself, that these two perspectives are so in conflict.

And the problem is that both of these perspectives are correct. Bouldering can indeed be more accessible. It can be an individual activity or much more social - your choice. If a new climber is looking to build strength or movement technique quickly, it can be a good pathway for improvement. And it is less expensive - shoes and chalk bag are all you need, and some gyms even charge less for bouldering. But it is also often more difficult physically, more dangerous, and in a lot of instances, if you are a new participant to the sport of climbing, it is simply less clear what the pathway is to becoming a boulderer. For many people, "just go try it" simply is not enough.

Bouldering has a business problem.

At most gyms, roped-climbing has a very clear pathway to entry. The new user basically says hello, signs up for a class, takes a class, learns some safety skills, gets a card and when they come back they feel part of something, having been clearly introduced to the activity and now having a certification card and requisite knowledge to go with it. They are now climbers. At some facilities, a prospective customer at a climbing gym who wants to learn what bouldering is may simply be shown the bouldering area with best wishes from the front desk. In that scenario, it is doubtful that the customer will walk away from the experience either well-informed about bouldering or well-equipped with the confidence to come back. It is unlikely they will have learned much about climbing movement and there is a reasonably good chance they will be intimidated (however unintentionally) by more experienced climbers or even simply the terrain itself.

Building bridges for bouldering.

If climbing gyms present the most appealing aspects of bouldering for new and beginner customers and work hard to minimize the challenges and barriers inherent, people who try bouldering may indeed enjoy the activity and want to return. But if they want to really stick with it, new participants have to bridge the gap between trying bouldering, and actually learning techniques to improve, that it is okay to fall (a lot), and that much of the excitement from bouldering can come from the challenge of just a few moves rather than always getting to the top. Some strategic planning with instruction and programming that provides a more consistent image and introduction to bouldering, as well as good customer service and sales that highlight the unique characteristics of the activity, will likely create customers with a better idea of what bouldering is, why it is fun, how to enjoy it safely, and how to improve.

Create Better Opportunities with Bouldering

1. More clearly introduce bouldering to beginners.

Most new climbing participants have one goal - to get to the top of the wall. Bare bones top-rope classes only teach the basics of belay instruction without much emphasis on movement. Get them to the top of a bouldering wall as well. Adding a few minutes to these classes to teach basic movement technique, language, and safety on the ground in a bouldering setting will leave the new climber with more knowledge about the sport, bouldering as an activity unto itself, and more reasons to return.

\*Bouldering is a dangerous activity in the gym or outside. Sufficient and ideally uniform landing surfaces under bouldering areas will not only make the experience more appealing, but more importantly, safer.

## 2. Breakdown the intimidation factor.

It takes confidence to try something new. Imagine if for your first trip down a ski slope you were introduced to the mogul course during the freestyle team practice. This is what bouldering terrain in a busy gym may often seem like to a novice climber. In order to minimize the intimidation factor as a barrier to entry or progression, always make sure a gym has bouldering movement that is just as physically easy as the easiest roped routes, and whenever possible create specific climbing areas for new users. This will be hard to do if the facility only has very steep or isolated bouldering terrain, but if the goal is to make the experience more appealing to a wider range of customers consider investing in bigger holds and easier routes, or even remodeling to add some beginner terrain.

## 3. Build a pathway for novice customers to become regular participants.

First-time participants will be more likely to return if they walk away with new knowledge or experiences. Providing more introductory and intermediate level bouldering-specific classes that teach the range of climbing movements in a structured setting will create a clearer pathway for customers to progress through stages of the climbing experience. Teaching new customers important information such as details of bouldering history and grades, spotting technique, and bouldering etiquette will also help. The more a newer climber can feel they are advancing and increasing their own standards for achievement, the more likely they will remain interested and enthused.

## 4. Sustain interest with new routes, quality service and programming.

Maintaining high route turnover in a bouldering area is extremely important, as many new routes of various grades can be tried by climbers in one session. Once a climber is hooked on bouldering as an activity, they will likely return to meet with friends or have a regularly scheduled work-out. Movement classes that focus on learning the best body positions to conquer specific challenges, and offering programs that identify how to utilize bouldering training to be a stronger sport-climber or vice versa, will likely be well-received. Organized beginner or adult bouldering groups, recreational competitions, and other events will keep customers coming back for more.

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## **Tonight's Top Ten List: Things That Get You In Trouble**

By: Robert Angell, Angell Law Offices

The recent climbing death at a community center in Michigan seems to have raised a number of questions about who was at fault and why. Was there an equipment failure? Was there negligent supervision? Was the release valid? It seems like a good time for a quick review of the things that can get an operator into legal (or financial) difficulty. So, with apologies to David Letterman, here is tonight's Top Ten List (in no particular order and by no means exhaustive):

10. **Premises liability.** Obstructions and hazards in the parking lot, ice on the sidewalk, water or objects on the floor to slip on or trip over, electrical problems, sanitation, etc., etc., etc. (If you think a slip and fall can't seriously hurt anyone, I have two words: Natasha Richardson.)
9. **Negligent hiring/failure to train.** Make sure that your training program is up to snuff and that everyone you hire (including family members, etc.) completes that training. Pre-employment background checks and drug screening can't hurt. If your customers include children, keep in mind the unfortunate fact that predators seek the easiest access they can find.
8. **Negligent supervision.** Is your employee (or that contracted parks & rec employee) well informed as to your procedures and paying attention to what's going on? Better make sure.
7. **Intentional/criminal acts.** Employee theft (from your business and from one another), violence, illegal drugs, intoxication, firearms violations, etc. Enough said.
6. **Wrongful termination.** In most states, you can hire and fire at will, but not for a reason that a court would find discriminatory (i.e., race, color, religion, gender).
5. **Discrimination/harassment claims.** You should have a written nondiscrimination policy and a sexual harassment policy, including the names of officers to whom employees can make complaints.
4. **Equipment inspection/failure.** What's your policy for inspecting rental equipment? Walls? Holds? Do you inspect equipment owned by customers? If not, do you disclaim responsibility for their equipment in writing?
3. **Competition from former employees.** Protect yourself with a reasonable written non-compete agreement.
2. **Medical/first aid claims.** Are all your employees certified in CPR? Do you have a defibrillator on site? Do you have written procedures for reporting and treating injuries?
1. **Leaky releases.** If in doubt, have your release and indemnification reviewed by a knowledgeable attorney. Don't trust the writing of a release to an employee - the wording of some homemade releases may actually have the opposite legal effect from what you intended. (I actually saw one that read "I agree not to indemnify ABC Rock Gym ... .")

To help avoid this parade of horrors, have written policies in place (and have a policy for the periodic review and updating of your policies). Consult the resources available from the CWA, including the Industry Practices and the engineering standards. Have adequate insurance in place (general liability, errors and omissions, key man). Make it your intention to operate your facility as a top-notch

professional recreation and training venue. Then (and perhaps most importantly), relax and enjoy your role in a vibrant, challenging, and rewarding sport.

Have a great summer.

Robert Angell, Esq.

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**Disclaimer:** The information provided above is offered for the general guidance of members of the Association and is not intended, and should not be construed, as the provision of legal advice in any pending or anticipated matter. Please consult your legal counsel for advice regarding any such matters.

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## Nicros secures patent for Extreme Hold Technology

According to a recent press release, Nicros Climbing Wall Systems received a patent for its Extreme Hold Technology™. An alternative to the heavier, resin-poured holds, holds made with this new material will be lighter while maintaining their durability.

According to Nicros, "This weight reduction also means less money spent on shipping, leaving more to spend on new holds."

For more information, visit [www.nicros.com](http://www.nicros.com).

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## Member Profile: Rock Candy Holds

With 30 shapes and one gym to test its products Rock Candy Holds entered the climbing industry under the radar but with the determination of owners Nathan and Liz Yokum, the line of holds has flourished to over 250 Scab Snacks, Schnazzies, Smooches and Pipe Dreams.

"By starting small, we were able to take the feedback from our customers and fine-tune our product line," founder and owner Nathan Yokum says.

Because both Yokums are climbers (frequenting Cooper's Rock, WV and the Red River Gorge), they are able to design their holds to fit the wants and needs of the average climber.

"By being active in the industry attending events, sponsoring comps, helping gym owners and route setters decide what sets will be best for them, Rock Candy keeps it's finger on the pulse of the climbing community and offers products that are exciting and comfortable for climbing on over and over again."

Rock Candy tests its polyurethane holds at local climbing and bouldering gyms, offering testers the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions. Before use, the holds must pass a series of "quality control" tests that "ensures each hold has a flat back, even texture and color, and straight bolt holes."

For more information on Rock Candy Holds, visit their website at [www.rockcandyholds.com](http://www.rockcandyholds.com).

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**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.