



The **MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL** of **SCOTLAND**

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INFORMATION SHEET

*** CLIMBING WALL MANAGEMENT * ***

Information for Wall Managers

Managing Climbing Walls for Climbers

The MCoS's stance on the management of walls is that outlined in the BMC Walls Manual. MCoS believe it is better to have a discrete approach to management, both because this better fits with the whole ethos of climbing, and also because in the experience of other walls it has been found that restrictive management practices have tended to cause more public management problems than they solve.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

From a management point of view it is far better to get away from the 'gate-keeping' approach to safety management and adopt one more in line with a customer care approach.

INDUCTION TO CLIMB

There are over 700 climbing walls in the UK and it is common practice not to insist on any form of induction of climbers. This is fully in line with the MCoS views on management, which is in turn agreed to by the H&SE as good practice. All these walls have insurance.

It should be born in mind that if the centre management are in any way judging the competence of adult climbers to use the wall facility and those climbers have an accident then the management are leaving themselves open to a greater degree of liability. It is much better to let adult climbers make their own assessments and then make a declaration to that effect.

If a climber registers as a novice / beginner, it is at this point that some form of 'course' can be offered to ensure basic competence at the wall. The situation is different regarding minors as in law they are not capable of making such decisions (although in fact many will be).

COURSES FOR BEGGINERS

A course need not be very extensive (or off-putting to participation). It should however, be set up by a Technical Expert in the field. This person can be contracted in to help set up such a course, its administration and can give in-house training to centre staff. This Expert need only be contracted in during the set-up and for a few days per year to make ongoing alterations, or to ensure new staff have the necessary knowledge. The centre staff trained in this way need not be holders of a Single Pitch Award (SPA), although it would be prudent to ensure that they have some knowledge of climbing and the SPA award does give centre management an indication of a basic competence (there are many walls giving in-house training to their staff that do not possess SPA).

In this respect it should be noted that:

- the SPA certificate is a minimum standard certificate for the instruction and supervision of groups.
- An SPA certificate is not regarded as inferring a role as a Technical Expert.
- An SPA does not give the holder the responsibility for making decisions about a range of skills found in amateur climbers who are independent.
- It is overstating the competence of the SPA holder to place them in a position of assessing amateur climber's skills.
- They should not be working in isolation from a system originally set-up by a Technical Expert.
- Mountain Instructors (MIA, MIC) would be regarded as Technical Experts.

MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

There are various excellent systems being operated in walls across Scotland and the UK. They allow for freedom from undue restrictions and it is suggested that you contact some for advice (Glasgow Climbing Centre, Alien Rock, Kinlochleven Ice Factor and others).

Some of the most pertinent issues are outlined below:

1) ENTRY FORMS

Many walls address the issue of safety management and liability by having an entry form which everyone must sign. Visitors are asked to register certain particulars:

- i) are they experienced climbers, or novices (with some former experience) / beginners
- ii) that they understand the risks of climbing (UIAA participation Statement)
- iii) that they understand climbing etiquette (hazards of climbing under other climbers, at what height it is best to stop bouldering etc.)
- iv) that they know how to use climbing hardware (harness, belays, ropework including use of appropriate knots etc.) necessary for the normal use of the facility.

Regarding the first point above - it has already been explained why this decision should be left to the individual climber and not the centre management. The centre obviously takes this on trust. In practice those unsure of climbing will be honest and will register as beginners (and they would not normally have the necessary climbing equipment) and can be catered for as detailed below. If they do not, the management should not be overly concerned as asking this information fulfils any Duty of Care and liability in this respect.

The entry form's questions regarding the 3rd and 4th point above need only be in brief. However, having information about tying into harnesses and about belaying, available in detail both at the desk where they register and on posters at the wall as aid-memoirs is useful to climbers.

The form may then ask for a signature and normal waiver - that they understand all the above and take responsibility for their own safety.

Many walls operate a user card system which is a very quick method of assessing whether someone knows all the above points and saves time at the reception desk as those issued with a card need not be asked to sign the waiver again (unless they are taking responsibility for another climber - see below).

2) NOVICES OR BEGINNERS

- When adult visitors register as beginners and they are on their own, it may be prudent to:
 - a) alert them to the fact that personal professional supervision is not available at the centre and that they should come back at another time with an experienced climber (offering a list of local clubs would be helpful - MCofS can supply various information) or
 - b) offer them an introductory course in rock climbing at the centre after which they should be competent enough to act responsibly at the wall. This should not have any element of assessment nor certification.
- If an experienced climber is accompanying them, then that climber can be asked to accept responsibility for giving supervision and a registration form could allow somewhere to indicate this (as separate to the initial registration form).

3) MINORS

Regarding minors, there is a greater duty of care. Many walls operate different systems for minors between 14yr and 16yr and those under that age.

- For 16 year old climbers and under, it is prudent to stipulate that they are accompanied by a responsible adult (who signs on the form for that responsibility) in the first instance.
- If minors between 16yrs-14yrs wish to climb by themselves (bouldering) or with other minors of that age, then it is acceptable in most circumstances: they may be regarded as 'Junior Members' by the management and undergo a course offered by the centre which is conducted by a competent person (and through a system overseen by a Technical Expert). If such courses are not being offered by the centre then supervision by a responsible adult is normal. It may also be prudent to get a parental consent form signed if 16 - 14yr old climbers are being allowed to participate on their own (not if they are accompanied by an adult). It must be born in mind that many minors between these ages are amongst the best climbers in the UK and are highly competent.
- Those under 14yrs are often required to always be accompanied by responsible adults.

This information should help managers design a system that is easy to operate, acceptable to the climbing wall users, and acceptable to the centre staff.

Employee Safety

There are currently no requirements under the H&SE pertaining to this activity by employees. Activities undertaken by wall staff would include route-setting, setting up in-situ top-ropes, cleaning holds, structural checks, tightening holds etc.

The Climbing Wall Manufacturers Association (CWMA) run “Route Setter” courses which concentrate on safety, following some of the guidelines set up and agreed as good practice by H&SE for ‘Rope Access’ work employers. This latter qualification for industry (the ERATA certificates) may in time be regarded as requirements for employees undertaking work at indoor climbing walls.

At the present time it would be necessary to show that the centre management have done everything reasonable to ensure the safety of employees working at the wall if leader bolts were used during this process. It would be worth getting a Technical Expert to give training to such staff. If the management are intending to undertake a lot of ongoing activity at the wall, then it may be prudent to get staff to undergo a CWMA course or an Errata 1 course as a minimum.

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