



National Recommended Safety Standards For Climbing & Rappelling ACTIVITIES

In recent years the popularity of vertical sports such as climbing & rappelling has seen rapid growth throughout the country. Royal Ranger groups at various levels have likewise begun to include such activities as a regular part of their annual events. Many groups are realizing the need to conduct high-action, challenging activities in order to retain the interest and involvement of older boys, a factor that is commonly seen as essential for the ongoing growth and development of our program. Activities such as climbing and rappelling have become a common means of providing such challenges.

These activities can be very effective in meeting our goal of attracting and retaining older boys, provided they are conducted in a manner that is safe for everyone involved. However, with the rapid growth of interest in these activities large variations have developed in terms of safety standards and procedures used when conducting such events. The need has therefore been recognized for a nationwide standard for safety procedures involving vertical activities. The National Royal Rangers Office is therefore recommending that all Royal Rangers groups comply with the principles of the Boy Scouts of America *Climb On Safely* orientation program when conducting any vertical activity.

Climb On Safely is the Boy Scouts of America's recommended safety standard for climbing & rappelling activities. The program consists of eight safety principals

which may be taught by any adult leader at the local level. No special training or certification is required in order to teach the principles of the program. Program materials include a 4-page full-color brochure explaining each principle as well as a training outline. It should be noted however that *Climb on Safely* is **NOT** a climbing or rappelling training program. It is merely an orientation on the safety standards to be followed when conducting vertical activities.

Information on *Climb On Safely* may be obtained by visiting the national Boy Scouts of America website at www.scouting.org.

The following information is a partial reprint of the information contained in the *Climb On Safely* brochure, 2003 printing. All Royal Rangers involved in vertical activities are encouraged to abide by these safety standards.

1. Qualified Supervision

All climbing and rappelling must be supervised by a mature, conscientious adult at least 21 years of age who understands the risks inherent to these activities. This adult supervisor is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of the Boy Scouts of America's *Climb On Safely* procedure. One additional adult who is at least 18 years of age must also accompany the unit. Units with more than 10 youths in the same climbing/rappelling session must have an additional adult leader at

least 18 years of age for each 10 additional youth participants.

The adult supervisor is responsible for ensuring that someone in the group is currently trained in American Red Cross Standard First Aid and CPR (a 6 1/2-hour course). In addition, Wilderness First Aid Basic (a 16-hour course) is recommended for units going to remote areas. A course of equivalent length and content from another nationally recognized organization can be substituted.

2. Qualified Instructors

A qualified rock climbing instructor who is at least 21 years of age must supervise all BSA climbing/rappelling activities. A currently trained BSA climbing director or instructor is highly recommended. Contact your local council or regional service center to locate a qualified individual. The climbing instructor has successfully completed a minimum of 10 hours of instructor training for climbing/rappelling from a nationally or regionally recognized organization, a climbing school, or a college-level climbing/rappelling course. Every instructor must have prior experiences in teaching climbing/rappelling to youth and must agree to adhere to *Climb On Safely* and the guidelines set in *Topping Out*.

Examples of sources of qualified climbing and rappelling instructors include, but are not limited to, the following:

- BSA climbing directors or instructors

- National Outdoor Leadership School
- Wilderness Education Association
- American Mountain Guides Association
- The Mountaineers
- Recreational Equipment Inc.
- Eastern Mountain Sports
- University or college climbing/rappelling instructors or students
- Project Adventure instructors
- National Speleological Society chapters

Leaders and instructors should also consult current literature on climbing and rappelling for additional guidance. *Topping Out: A BSA Climbing/Rappelling Manual*, No. 3207A, is the most authoritative guide currently available from the Boy Scouts of America.

3. Physical Fitness

A fitness regimen is recommended prior to participation in climbing/rappelling. The adult supervisor should adapt all supervision, discipline, and precautions to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions.

4. Safe Area

All BSA climbing/rappelling activities must be conducted using an established climbing/rappelling site or facility, including a portable or commercial facility. A qualified climbing instructor should survey the site in advance of the activity to identify and evaluate possible hazards and to determine whether the site is suitable for the age, maturity, and skill level of the participants. The instructor should also verify that the site is sufficient to safely and comfortably accommodate the number of participants in the activity within the available time. An emergency evacuation route must be identified in advance.

5. Equipment

The climbing instructor should verify that the proper equipment is available for the size and ability level of participants. Helmets, rope, and climbing hardware must be approved by the UIAA (Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme) or CE (European Community Norm), or meet ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) standards. All equipment must be acquired new or furnished by the instructor.

An approved climbing helmet must be worn during all BSA climbing/rappelling activities where the participant's feet are more than shoulder height above ground level. When using a commercial climbing gym, the climbing facility's equipment procedures apply.

6. Planning

When planning, remember the following:

- Obtain written parental consent to participate in climbing/rappelling activities for each participant.

- In the event of severe weather or other problem, share the climbing/rappelling plan and an alternate with parents and the unit committee.
- Secure the necessary permits or written permission for using private or public lands.
- Enlist the help of a qualified climbing instructor.
- Be sure the instructor has a map for the area being used and obtains a current weather report for the area before the group's departure.

It is suggested that at least one of the adult leaders has an electronic means of communication in case of an emergency.

Before any activity, an adult leader should develop and share an emergency plan that includes the location of a nearby medical facility and the means of communicating with parents during the outing.

7. Environmental Conditions

The instructor, each adult leader, and each participant assume responsibility for monitoring potentially dangerous environmental conditions that may include loose, crumbly rock; poisonous plants; wildlife; and inclement weather. Use the buddy system to monitor concerns such as dehydration, hypothermia, and an unusually high degree of fear or apprehension. The adult supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the group leaves no trace of its presence at the site. See the *Principles of Leave No Trace*, No. 21-105.

8. Discipline

Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for safely climbing and rappelling and has been oriented in Climb On Safely and Leave No Trace. All BSA members should respect and follow all instructions and rules of the climbing instructor. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing and should be reviewed for all participants before climbing or rappelling begins. When participants know the reasons for rules and procedures, they are more likely to follow them. The climbing instructor must be strict and fair, showing no favoritism.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR ROYAL RANGERS

(not part of Climb On Safely):

Military Training: Military training or experience is **NOT** accepted as adequate instructor qualification due to the significant differences between military methods and equipment and commonly accepted non-military safety standards, particularly when the participants are children or adolescents. Military equipment is likewise **NOT** approved unless it meets the equipment standards noted above.

Age Restrictions: The following age restrictions are recommended for all participants involved in climbing and rappelling activities conducted by Royal Rangers groups at any level organizational:

Ranger Kids

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's own height with trained adult spotters
- Climbing is limited to a climbing gym, portable climbing wall, or other age-appropriate facility using trained adult instructors & age-appropriate equipment.
- Ranger Kids are not approved for rappelling or to serve as belayers or spotters.

Discovery Rangers

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's own height with trained adult spotters
- Top-roped climbing on natural rock face, in a climbing gym, or using a portable climbing wall or other age-appropriate facility using trained adult instructors.
- May rappel with trained adult belayers
- Discovery Rangers are not approved to serve as belayers or spotters.

Adventure & Expedition Rangers

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's own height with trained spotters
- Top-roped climbing on natural rock face, in a climbing gym, or using a portable climbing wall or other age-appropriate facility using trained adult instructors.
- May rappel with trained belayers
- May serve as belayers or spotters after proper training with adult supervision and backup.

Lead Climbing: Lead climbing is not approved for any Royal Ranger activities.

Zip Lines: Zip lines or other activities where boys are held or transported above the ground at a height higher than the boy's own height require that the boy be securely connected to the transport device or other safety system to prevent a fall. Boys must be secured in such a way that they cannot come loose or let go, either intentionally or unintentionally. Zip lines further require a braking system to prevent an impact at the bottom end of the line.

Insurance: Additional insurance coverage may be required for some vertical activities. Event organizers are responsible to insure adequate insurance coverage is in place.