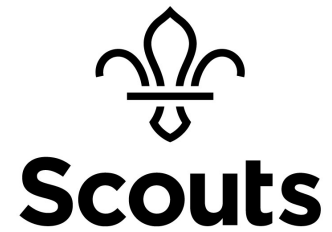


Learning from Safety Incidents – Abseiling 1



Item Code: CS245001 Dec/24

Introduction

This case study aims to support all scout volunteers with anonymised information and key learning points on safety incidents reported to UKHQ. By considering real-life scenarios, volunteers can gain valuable insights into effective strategies for managing similar situations and all scout groups are better prepared for future activities.

Case Studie Overview

An Activity Leader was taking a group of 5 abseiling on a natural cliff face in fair weather. The Activity Leader had an assistant, and the group were accompanied by another two volunteers. One of these volunteers was also a parent. The Activity Leader was the only person regularly using this location for abseiling, and the only person suitable qualified to run the activity. All adults were positioned at the top of the crag during the session. There was no safety barrier at the top of the crag.

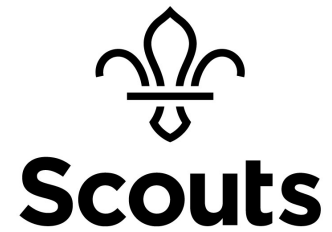
All member of the group had abseiled down once and were on their second go. A member froze partway through the abseil and the Activity Leader had then lowered him down manually, the member became distressed as they could not undo their safety line. A volunteer was becoming distressed at the top of the crag and had approached the edge on several occasions. The Activity Leader had asked the Assistant to walk the short path (2 minutes) from top to bottom to support the member at the ground. Whilst waiting for the assistant to reach the bottom, the Activity Leader decided to abseil down to the member instead of using the abseil line only. He fell from the top of the cliff narrowly missing the distressed member, resulting in serious injuries.

Risk assessments and operating procedures were in place but branded by the Activity Leaders professional company and not location specific. All equipment used was owned by the campsite where the incident occurred.

The members screamed and ran away, a volunteer with a medical background stumbled and fell on the Activity Leader when treating them (so was asked to leave). The group reported not having received an emergency procedure briefing before or on arrival, these emergency procedures were also not accessible.

The incident response was led by a Deputy Site Warden and involved coastguard, mountain rescue, ambulance and police services. It was reported to UKHQ by email the same evening and by telephone the next day.

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Questions to consider

1. Most critical incidents are a result of a multitude of smaller contributing factors, can you identify some of the contributing factors? This can be known as lining up the lemons.
2. What could have been done differently?
3. When attempting to manage several factors at a time, what human performance tools can you or do you use?
4. What risk assessment and emergency procedures should be planned and communicated ahead of time?
5. When and how should critical incidents be reported to UKHQ?

Key Learning Points

- The Activity Leader should take responsibility to identify, brief and deploy other volunteers to appropriately to support the safe delivery of their activity.
- Leader of any activity should identify and use the least risky method of solving a problem. This is the application of good risk assessment practice, both written and dynamic, that identifies those options with least risk.
- Volunteers and activity leaders should follow best practice in line with assessed external standards for each activity.
- Emergency procedures and group planning should have considered how young people not directly involved in an incident are best supported.
- All leaders and volunteers should be informed of and understand the emergency procedures prior to the start on any activity or camp.
- Emergency Procedures should identify and state the best ways of communicating location to emergency services, being mindful of where the nearest access points to the location are.
- A scouting risk assessment must be completed prior to any activity taking place. Executive committees must understand their responsibilities including when it is appropriate to use commercial businesses and their risk assessments, as stated in POR.
- Scout units offering adventurous activities need to be clear and not mix the rules and procedures when these are provided by in house scouting volunteers or external commercial companies.