

Safety and health alert

04/96 Girl falls from abseiling tower

Incident

An eleven-year-old girl suffered shock and bruising in an uncontrolled fall from an eight metre abseiling tower at Hillarys Marina in October 1995.

The girl was instructed in abseiling technique and readied for descent. One hand was placed on the rope above her head and the other hand on the rope beneath her. The rope ran through a figure eight device, with the bottom hand controlling the speed of descent. A person was stationed on the ground to act as brake person in emergencies.

The girl took her bottom hand off the rope and went into an uncontrolled fall. The person on the ground was attending another abseiler and was not in attendance on the brake during the girl's descent.

Factors

1. Poor communication between the dispatcher on the tower and the brake person on the ground.
2. Two descent ropes were in use but only one brake person was in attendance on the ground.
3. The person on the ground was engaged in another task and was not in position during the girl's descent.

Recommendations

Any organisation or charity group intending to include an abseiling tower at an event they are organising must ensure:

1. One brake person must be provided at the bottom of every rope in use.
2. A back up system must be used - either a top or bottom belay, an auto locking device, or a prusik loop.
3. Any person within two metres of an unguarded edge must be secured with a tether, top or bottom belay, prusik, ascender or auto locking device.
4. Supervising staff must pay close attention to their tasks. Communications and handovers must be clearly understood by all personnel.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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