

Scouting America

Crossroads of the West Council

Unit Policy for Climbing, Rappelling, and Specialized Climbing Activities

The policies below apply to unit-level climbing, rappelling, and specialized climbing activities, including canyoneering, ice climbing, mountaineering, and caving conducted at off-council property locations. These policies are applicable to each person engaging in such activities, including Scouting America instructors, instructors trained by professional organizations or their accredited providers, unit leaders, and participants.

A. ACTIVITY ADMINISTRATION. The following must be observed in all climbing, rappelling, and specialized climbing activities:

A1: Each person must comply with these policies, Crossroads of the West Council (CWC) policies, Climb On Safely, Age Appropriate Guidelines for Scouting Activities, the Guide to Safe Scouting, Belay On, the applicable provisions of the Scouting America National Camp Accreditation Program National Camp Standards, the applicable provisions of the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) Standards published by the ACCT, and where appropriate, Canyoneering Safely and Cave Safely Cave Softly. In the case of a conflict between the listed applicable publications, the provision most suitable to the activity shall apply.

A2: Parts A and B of the Annual Health and Medical Record must be properly completed for each person. If the activity is longer than 72 hours, part C of the Annual Health and Medical Record must be completed by a health professional. Persons with serious medical problems should have approval from a physician to participate and provide the information to the supervising instructor so that appropriate accommodations can be made. The Annual Health and Medical Record must be turned in to and reviewed by designated personnel and must be accessible. Any person that exceeds the maximum Height/Weight Restrictions in Part C of the Annual Health and Medical Record may not participate in the activity if the activity area is more than 30 minutes away from an emergency vehicle/accessible roadway.

A3: Each instructor must be trained by a CWC approved program. If training is obtained outside of the CWC, including all guide companies, approval from the Council Climbing Committee is required. For additional information about guide companies or training received by organizations outside of the CWC, contact the Council Climbing Committee. NCS trained Climbing Directors must also receive approval from the Council Climbing Committee.

A4: The qualified instructor managing the activity must be at least 21 years of age and be current in their training. Additional instructors to meet the required ratios (see A6 and C2 below) must be at least 18 years of age. Proof of continuing education, qualification/certification must be provided, documented, and approved by the Council Climbing Committee every three years with the exception of NCS trained Climbing Directors.

A5: Each activity must have a minimum of two qualified instructors, e.g., one Climbing Director or Climbing Level II Instructor and one other Climbing Level II Instructor or Climbing Level I Instructor.

A6: The ratio of participants to instructors for climbing activities is 6:1.

A7: The Council Climbing Committee and/or the Committee Chair reserves the right to suspend or revoke the qualifications of any instructor that is determined to lack satisfactory knowledge, skill, understanding, and/or judgment.

A8: An instructor must brief everyone as to what is expected to take place during the activity and review proper safety practices, techniques, signals, and equipment use before entering the activity area.

A9: An emergency plan must be in place for every activity.

A10: The qualified instructors must ensure that clothing, helmets, harnesses, connections, and knots are double-checked for every instructor and participant in any belayed activity.

A11: Only one participant is permitted to climb or rappel at a given station at a time.

A12: Horseplay should never be encouraged, permitted, or tolerated while the activity is being conducted. Speedy or bounding descents that place a shock or unusual strain on the anchors, the rope, and/or the belayer are not allowed. Australian, or assault face-first rappelling will not be taught or used.

A13: No participant is ever coerced or pressured into attempting an activity. A participant may be encouraged to take the next small step, but the final choice of participation and performance is left entirely up to the individual.

A14: At least one person present at the activity must have a valid certificate of training in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). If the activity site is more than 30 minutes away from an emergency vehicle/accessible roadway, then a person trained to a minimum level of wilderness and remote first aid (16 hours) must be present.

A15: All instructors and participants must be belayed when climbing or rappelling.

A16: The following belay methods are recommended for rappelling:

- Double-line rappel with an independent belay line.
- Single-line rappel with an independent belay line.

In certain circumstances, the following belay methods are acceptable for rappelling.

- Double-line rappel with a fireman's belay.
- Single-line rappel with a fireman's belay.

A17: Backup belay is required. In rare, natural area, instances where there is not enough space for a backup belayer, using trained belayers to belay with an assisted-breaking device or hitch is allowed.

A18: Each person must comply with applicable land manager group size limits, permit requirements, and other rules, regulations, and agreements.

B. EQUIPMENT, ANCHORS, AND RIGGING. The following equipment, anchor, and rigging requirements must be observed in all climbing, rappelling, and specialized climbing activities:

B1: All equipment shall be used, inspected, and retired according to the manufacturer's recommendations. In the absence of manufacturer's recommendations, all soft goods must be retired no more than 10 years from the date of purchase. All equipment must be used in the manner intended by the manufacturer.

B2: Rapid links must have a minimum-rated breaking strength of 5,000 lbf (22.2 kN) and must meet the requirements of and be stamped compliant with UIAA or EN standards.

B3: Dynamic Rope shall meet UIAA or EN standards or be approved by the manufacturer for belaying a single person.

B4: Low Stretch Rope and Static Rope shall meet one or more of the following standards: UIAA, NFPA, EN, or CI or be approved by the manufacturer for belaying a single person.

B5: When used to belay two people the rope(s) must be rated for a two-person load (e.g., assisted rappel or pick-off).

B6: A written log of the history of each rope used in unit activities must be kept, indicating (a) the date the rope was purchased; (b) the date the rope was placed in service; and (c) any environmental, severe, or unusual stresses that were placed on the rope.

B7: All webbing and cordage used in life safety systems by participants must have a known history and must be uniquely marked and permanently identified.

B8: Equipment inventory records must be kept that identify retirement criteria based on manufacturer's recommendations.

B9: Every person must wear a UIAA, CEN, or ASTM approved rock-climbing helmet with the chin strap secured when rappelling, climbing, belaying, or when within the risk zone and fall zone. Personal climbing helmets and harnesses may be used if inspected and approved by the on-site supervising instructor.

B10: The qualified instructor managing the activity will determine if gloves are optional or required.

B11: Anchor systems must be fail-proof or backed up and the load equalized. Pitons may not be used in anchor systems. Trees used as anchor points must be well-rooted, healthy, at least six inches in diameter at the point of attachment and protected from damage. Anchor systems must be rigged using a releasable rappel or other belay system that allows participants to be quickly and safely lowered if the rappel device becomes jammed.

B12: Every rappel/belay device must be rigged to provide appropriate friction for the circumstances and characteristics that are specific to the rappel/belay and the participant.

B13: Rescue equipment and medical supplies appropriate for likely incidents must be present in the activity area.

C. CANYONEERING. The following must be observed in all canyoneering activities where the canyon to be descended is rated Class III or higher according to the ACA Canyon Rating System:

C1: In addition to an approved climbing instructor qualification, the qualified instructor managing the canyoneering activity must also have an approved canyoneering qualification and be current in their training. Proof of continuing education, qualification/certification must be provided to, documented, and approved by the Council Climbing Committee every three years. For additional information about guide companies or training received by organizations outside of the CWC, contact the Council Climbing Committee.

C2: There must be a minimum of two instructors for all canyoneering activities maintaining a ratio of 5:1 (participants to instructors). Canyoneering activities must not exceed 12 individuals (participants and instructors) per canyon.

C3: Canyon Leaders may only supervise the descent of canyons that are approved for the instructor's level of qualification. A list of approved canyons may be obtained from the Council Climbing Committee. Approved canyons are designated as Level I or Level II canyons.

C4: A person trained to a minimum level of wilderness and remote first aid (16 hours) must be present during the activity.

C5: The supervising instructor must have descended the canyon prior to the activity and where possible a recent descent of the canyon should be done. In addition, at least one other person must have the knowledge, skill, and experience to safely exit the canyon and summon assistance in an emergency.

C6: Each participant must attend a ground school session and an on-rock session suitable for the canyon to be descended.

C7: If the canyon necessitates swimming, then each person must pass a Scouting America swim check and dual buddy system (person in front and person behind) must be utilized.

C8: The canyon to be descended shall be appropriate according to the mental, physical, emotional, and social maturity of the participants. Scouts may descend approved Level I canyons. Older Scouts (13 years or older), and Venturers may descend approved Level I and II canyons. For information on Level I and Level II canyons contact the Council Climbing Committee. Refer to Canyoneering Safely for age-appropriate canyoneering guidelines.

D. ICE CLIMBING AND MOUNTAINEERING. The following must be observed in all ice climbing and mountaineering activities:

D1: In addition to an approved climbing instructor qualification, the qualified instructor managing the activity must also have an approved ice climbing or mountaineering qualification and be current in their training. Proof of continuing education, qualification/certification must be provided to, documented, and approved by the Council Climbing Committee every three years. If an ice climbing or mountaineering qualification/certification is obtained outside of CWC training, the instructor must be approved by the Council Climbing Committee.

D2: Each person must wear appropriate eye protection when ice climbing.

D3: Ice screws may not be used as a part of any anchor system when ice climbing.

E. CAVING. The following must be observed in all caving activities:

E1: All activities must be in conformance with the Scouting America publication, Cave Safely Cave Softly.

E2: Contact the Council Climbing Committee for additional information.