

Abseiling fatality (7 October 2022)

A 21-year-old student was undertaking the final practical assessment for outdoor leadership certification. The student attached the abseil equipment and commenced to weight his rope. As he leaned backwards, it appears the rope released/loosened, and he fell 50 metres.



Photos of the incident site.

Safety information

Consider 'reasonably practicable' control measures to manage the risks of falls and falling objects associated with abseiling. Measures include, but are not limited to:

- using equipment designed for the activities undertaken, and conforming to relevant international (e.g., EN, ;UIAA/CE) and/or Australian Standards
- using equipment as per manufacturers recommendations, e.g., correctly fitted and adjusted, all equipment is compatible, loaded in correct direction, load ratings are not exceeded, expiry/discard criteria are not exceeded etc
- ensuring adequate fall protection measures when setting up abseil equipment, and when connecting/disconnecting to abseil ropes and belay systems before and after descent
- using suitable anchorage systems, with sufficient strength to support the intended loads and redundancy in the event of an anchor point failing
- using a suitable belay system to protect the abseiler in the event of loss of control during descent.

Adequate planning should occur prior to undertaking abseiling activities, with consideration given to:

- competency, roles and responsibilities of all participants
- adequate supervision of less experienced workers and participants
- type and amount of equipment required, pre-activity inspections, correct use, storage and discard/replacement as per manufacturer's instructions
- safe access to/from all areas of the activity
- fall protection during setup
- hazards on the descent path e.g., stability of the cliff face, obstacles, overhangs, loose/falling rocks etc
- maintaining communication between abseiler and top/bottom of pitch e.g., lines of sight, verbal communications, signals etc
- environmental considerations e.g., weather, climate, effect on personnel and equipment performance
- rescue and emergency procedures, including testing these procedures to ensure they are effective.

Statistics

This is the second fatality from outdoor adventures such as abseiling and rock climbing within the last 12 months.

Related guidance material

- [Abseiling and Climbing Adventure Activity Good Practice Guide – Outdoor Council of Australia](#)
- [Core Adventure Activity Good Practice Guide – Outdoor Council of Australia](#)
- [List of UIAA Standards – International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation \(UIAA\)](#)

Further information

- [Traumatic event management plan – SafeWork NSW](#)
- [Mental health at work – NSW Government](#)
- [Speak Up Save Lives App – SafeWork NSW](#)
- [Subscribe to SafeWork NSW newsletters and updates](#)
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SOURCE: <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/compliance-and-prosecutions/incident-information-releases/other-industries/abseiling-fatality>