



Preventing Lowering Accidents

I WOULD BE VERY HAPPY if every reader of this book would make a simple three-step pledge. Doing so might save a few lives. A few of your own lives.

This year's edition reports a worrying leap in the number of accidents while lowering or preparing to lower from anchors atop single-pitch climbs. Having seen growing numbers of such accidents in recent years, we introduced lowering errors as a primary accident cause in our data tables in the 2016 edition; the errors include too-short ropes slipping through a belayer's device, communication mix-ups, and failure to retie properly at an anchor. In 2016, we recorded five such incidents. The following year, we counted six. This year we documented 12 lowering accidents.

Now this could be just a statistical blip. I sure hope so. It also might reflect the much-discussed "gym to crag" phenomenon, in which ill-prepared gym climbers venture outside without adequate mentoring. But here's the thing: About half of the climbers and belayers in this year's lowering reports were highly experienced. And yet they still made simple, extremely dangerous mistakes.

So, let's all pledge to take three basic steps on every single-pitch climb:

1. **Make a plan and communicate the plan.** Before each climb, tell your belayer if you plan to lower or rappel from the anchor, and stick to that plan. If circumstances force a change—like forgetting your rappel device—be absolutely certain your belayer understands the new plan before you weight the rope.
2. **Tie a stopper knot** in the belayer's end of the rope. Or tie in the belayer. Absolutely no exceptions.
3. **Weight-test your system** before unclipping from the anchor. Whether rappelling or lowering, find a way to test the ropes before committing to them.

These steps won't prevent every single lowering or communication error. But if everyone involved in lowering accidents in 2017 had followed all three steps, up to a dozen fewer climbers would have been injured or killed. Make the pledge. And insist that your climbing partners do too.

– Dougald MacDonald, Editor

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