



AAC Publications

Auto-Belay Fatality

Colorado, Northern Colorado

On June 12, a woman (57) died after falling 40 feet while climbing indoors. She appeared to have either become disconnected from an auto-belay or failed to clip into it. A police investigation found no fault in the equipment.

ANALYSIS

Though fatal accidents at indoor climbing gyms are extremely rare, there have been multiple cases involving auto-belays. In 2014, conservationist Mark Hesse died in a similar accident in Colorado. In 2021, a young climber died after falling 43 feet from an auto belay–equipped route in Sydney, Australia. Also in 2021, a 73-year-old man was seriously injured at a gym in Poland, falling 30 feet after his auto-belay line reportedly broke.

Don't become complacent. While auto-belays are great tools, they can present serious risk. Use them as if you were climbing with a partner by doing your own partner check. Before climbing, give a sharp upward tug after clipping in to the auto-belay to verify the connection, just as one might do after loading a Grigri to belay. (Sources: Mountain Project, Gymclimber.com, 9News, Owen Clarke.)

Images

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