

## **Info Log Entry: Climber 'hung up' by her helmet**

### **September 2013**

#### **Incident:**

In August 2013 a mobile climbing tower was operating within a shopping centre. The wall was equipped with auto belays. The activity was not being provided as a skill development session but simply as an 'experience'.

A 9 year old girl, having reached the top, sat down into her harness and was lowered by the auto belay. During her descent the rim of her helmet became hooked onto a hold on the wall and she was suspended from the chin-strap of the helmet.

The instructor present (possibly alerted by the child's parent) intervened to deal with the situation. The child sustained no major injuries and did not lose consciousness. She did however have a red and sore neck and she and her attending parent, perhaps aware of the potential consequences, were very upset by the incident.

#### **Note:**

This is not the first occasion in which this has occurred during the use of auto belays on mobile climbing towers.

#### **Lessons learned:**

1. Auto belay devices don't stop lowering until they are un-weighted, when this is anything other than the ground it can create problems, which would not occur with an attentive belayer.
2. Due to the design of most mobile climbing towers there is nothing and no one above the climber. Wearing a helmet therefore may create more risks than it mitigates.
3. Thinking about the design and orientation of individual holds, particularly on convex sections of the tower, may reduce the potential for such incidents (Don't put the Jugs on the bits that stick out!).
4. Whilst the use of auto belays may increase the number of active routes a single 'instructor' can operate participants will still require supervision. Ratios and the minimum levels of competence of instructors will therefore need to reflect this.