



## Abseiling Accident



### INCIDENT

At approximately 1230hrs on 1 July 2011 an abseiler, who was an employee of a window cleaning company, was cleaning the exterior windows of the north face of a high-rise building when his main rope failed.

The safety rope's shunt failed to engage, causing him to free fall to the ground. The abseiler survived the fall, receiving minor injuries.

### CIRCUMSTANCES

The abseiler had completed his IRATA level 1 training one month prior to his accident.

He had been teamed up with an experienced abseiler who on the day of the accident was working on the east face of the building. The experienced abseiler was comfortable that the abseiler involved in the accident was competent to work on his own, even though he was relatively inexperienced.

From the abseiler's training he became comfortable using a particular combination of equipment which he chose to use during his daily work activities. The abseiler's employer had supplied good quality equipment and had also supplied equipment requested by this employee. Prior to the accident the employer had supplied all of the employees with new rope guards as the existing ones were showing signs of wear.

### INVESTIGATION

The initial investigation found the main rope had failed 3.5 metres below the top of the building parapet. It appears the rope guard had slipped down, exposing the rope to a sharp edge on the building structure.

The abseiler had set up his own ropes, attaching the ropes in accordance to industry practice.

An independent industry expert was engaged to carry out a thorough check and review of the equipment used by the abseiler. The expert findings were that the main rope SRT Stop descender was in good order and both ropes were showing signs of wear but were still safe to use.

However while the safety rope Petzl shunt was in good order it had a small rope draw string attached to it. The abseiler had attached the draw string to the Petzl rope shunt to speed up the descent process when repositioning to the next level. This is a common practice used by operators to affect a descent without having to stop and re-adjust their back-up device. If he had been operating the Petzl rope shunt by hand the shunt would have held and stopped his descent after the main rope failed.

This particular Petzl rope shunt was designed primarily for the recreational industry. It does not conform to the European standard on back up devices for industrial systems EN 353-2. Therefore it should not be used for industrial abseiling.



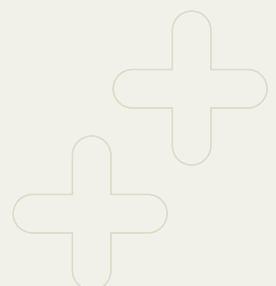
1

Rope Guard



2

Safety rope shunt with attached lanyard





## HAZARD MANAGEMENT BULLETIN

### GUIDANCE

Employers and operators should carry out a thorough check on all their back-up devices to ensure they are of the industrial rated type and being used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

Do not modify any industrial access or fall arrest equipment as it could compromise its integrity and fail when most needed.

### DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ADVICE

The findings from this investigation have highlighted the need for the industry to check on all of their back-up devices to ensure the equipment is of an industrial rated standard. Such devices are Petzl ASAP and/or type 1 fall arrest devices that will automatically track the descent of the operator and are compliant with EN 353-2. The type 1 designator refers to a fall-arrest device which travels along a fixed line and locks to the line when loaded. Such devices can only be loaded in the direction of the line.

### WHICH INDUSTRIES/SECTORS OR MATTERS WILL THIS INFORMATION BE RELEVANT TO?

All companies which have an abseiling component in their work activities. Such as industrial window cleaners and industrial abseilers.

*Note: This material has been prepared using the best information available to the Department of Labour at the time of publication. Information may change over time and it may be necessary for you to obtain an update. This material is also only intended to provide general advice and does not constitute legal advice. You should make your own judgement about action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with your workplace health and safety obligations under the law.*

