

Belay devices for sport climbing

A recommendation by the Club Arc Alpin

Key message:

The Alpine Associations recommend “semi-automatic belay devices” for sport climbing in climbing halls and on climbing crags.

The term “semi-automatic belay devices” or “semi-automatics” refers to all belay devices with assisted braking. Devices without assisted braking (tubes, HMS) are described as “dynamic belays”. Semi-automatic and dynamic belay devices both have their pros and cons. Only climbers who understand and master these devices can belay correctly and thus avoid accidents caused by improper use. Qualified training and practice are therefore essential.

Essential factors for belaying with all devices:

- Take the weight difference into account
- Choose the correct location near the wall
- Always follow the “brake hand principle”: The braking hand must always keep hold of the brake rope
- Movement pattern when letting out rope, lowering, blocking and releasing
- As little slack rope as possible
- Experience of holding falls
- Constant vigilance.

The age-old rule still applies: The weakest link in the safety chain is the belayer. Analysis shows that the number one cause of accidents is human error, not the belay device.

Approved by the CAA General Assembly on September, 17th, 2016 in Innsbruck.

