

Keep It
safe!



CLIMBING



INTRODUCTION

Climbing is gaining in popularity in Québec both as a recreational activity and as a sport. The proliferation of climbing sites, including artificial walls, has helped to attract new enthusiasts.

Climbing can be practised on natural walls made of rock faces or ice formations, or on artificial walls. Depending on the participant's skill level, climbing can involve techniques ranging from the *via ferrata* (iron road) fixed anchoring system and top roping, to the more complex techniques required for lead climbing.

Climbing is challenging. It is also a way to acquire and develop technical skills while becoming more physically fit. For outdoor rock and mountain climbers, it also provides a unique opportunity to discover the natural environment of Québec.

Because of the heights involved and the risk of falling, climbing can result in serious injuries. For this activity to remain a pleasant and safe experience, a number of guidelines need to be followed. A climber's safety depends on a number of factors, including guidance and training, gear, facilities, and behaviour and attitudes.

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1. GUIDANCE AND TRAINING

Climbing requires knowledge of the rules of the sport as well as mastery of scaling and belaying techniques. Beginners should never undertake climbing unless they have taken a course and have the proper guidance. Taking a course will enable beginners to gradually become familiar with the gear and how to use it, learn the various scaling techniques and adopt behaviours that make climbing as safe as possible.

Before taking a climbing course or signing up for an organized activity, individuals interested in climbing should verify the quality of the guidance they will receive. They can do this by contacting organizations accredited by the Fédération québécoise de la montagne et de l'escalade (FQME) whose managers have FQME-recognized certification under the Programme québécois de formation en escalade (PQFE). The FQME program offers instructors a continuum of training programs to enable them to teach climbing in accordance with safety and quality standards.

2. CHOOSING A SITE

In Québec, climbing enthusiasts have a large number of sites from which to choose—indoor or outdoor with artificial walls, rock faces or ice formations. Nevertheless, it is important that climbers choose a site where their abilities are suited to the degree of difficulty presented.

Because of its inherent flexibility, an artificial scaling wall can be used to introduce people to climbing or for training by those with more experience. This type of wall, with its various anchor points, can also be tilted to create a variety of routes.

A sport climbing site is a natural cliff landscaped and maintained to provide safe scaling conditions. Chosen primarily for the solidity of its rock, the sport climbing site is cleared of all unstable elements such as stones, shrubs, earth and moss. In addition, it offers fixed anchors for climbing devices.

Scaling cliffs that are unlandscaped, rarely visited and virtually untouched presents additional risks and should only be attempted by experienced climbers.

3. GEAR

Climbers should make sure that they have proper gear, that is to say, gear approved by the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA). This gear includes ropes, seat harnesses, straps, rings, cords, carabiners, belay devices, descenders, chocks (stoppers), and spring-loaded camming devices. Climbers should be sure to wear a helmet, appropriate footwear and a seat harness to ensure that they are securely fastened.

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Climbers should dress and equip themselves with the appropriate gear based on their skill level, the type of climb and the weather conditions. Staff at rock climbing schools and specialist shops will also be able to assist climbers in making their selections.

4. BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES

Most accidents involving injuries can be traced to the climber's behaviour and attitude. A large number of injuries result from a failure to obey the most rudimentary safety rules. Climbers should:

- choose a site with a degree of difficulty and an environment that correspond to their level of certification
- stay within their limits
- always climb with other people
- prepare their ascent in detail
- take into account the weather
- ensure they have the proper gear and check that it is in good condition
- let others know their route and the approximate time they plan to get back
- keep a constant watch over the climber they are belaying and maintain adequate communication at all times
- check their partners' knots and manoeuvres (double check)
- carry a first-aid kit
- have some means of communication to contact emergency services in case of an accident

Following this advice will help make climbing a safe activity.

HOW TO CONTACT US

Please contact us if you would like more information or copies of certain publications.

Mail: **Direction de la promotion de la sécurité**
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
100, rue Laviolette, bureau 306
Trois-Rivières (Québec) G9A 5S9

Telephone: 819-371-6033 or **1-800-567-7902**

Fax: 819-371-6992

E-mail: promotionsecurite@mels.gouv.qc.ca

Web site: www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/loisirsport