

Position Paper on Accident Reporting

1. Preamble

The inherent risks associated with mountain sports have always been recognised by mountaineers. While climbers, mountaineers, and their representative organisations have consistently been promoting safe practices, accidents and incidents continue to occur, sometimes with grave consequences for those involved, their families, and their wider communities.

The undersigned organisations share a commitment to safe climbing and mountaineering. Central to this commitment is a culture of continuous learning, in particular through the analyses of accidents and incidents. It is only by understanding what goes wrong that we can work towards effective, evidence-based prevention.

In this joint statement, we underscore the importance of fact-based accident prevention. We encourage national activity representative bodies, insurance companies, professional guiding and tourism organisations, sports associations, rescue services, instructors, guides, and all who cherish safe outdoor pursuits to support and engage with this important work.

2. Why accident reporting is important

Safe climbing and mountaineering depend on preparation and planning, solid skills, proper assessment of a complex and changeable environment, situational awareness, proper equipment and correct equipment usage, robust procedures, unfailing communication, and good team collaboration. The complexity is reflected in the variety of underlying factors behind accidents.

Usually, accidents are the result of an interplay between many such factors. The exact cause can be hard to determine, and the outcome difficult to prevent. That is why we must make an effort to collect data, analyse, and learn. Only by analysing the trends of past accidents can we design appropriate measures to ensure safe mountaineering.

3. Accident data is the raw material for safe climbing

Every incident and accident presents an opportunity to learn from experience. Climbers have always been sharing stories for others to learn from them. However, for stories to become more than anecdotal evidence, we must collect and compile them, add the observations, and turn the stories into data. Only when we see the whole picture can we effectively improve safety.

We need data to be able to take a systematic approach:

- Climbers need data to learn how to improve their skills, judgments, and procedures
- Instructors need data to teach safer procedures



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- Manufacturers need data to design equipment that is safe and prevents misuse
- Regulators need data to establish and improve equipment standards
- Federations need data to improve their training programmes
- Guides need data to be prepared for the objective dangers
- Insurers need data to assess risk levels
- Humans need data to learn how to distinguish the real dangers from the perceived

Above all, climbers must accept that all humans are fallible and learn from each other's mistakes without bias or blame. We need stories to learn – and data to see what is important to learn.

4. Accident reporting must be a community effort

Learning from accidents systematically requires a collective effort by the climbing community.

Reporting systems must be designed, set up, and organised by mountain sport practitioners and their organisations, ideally supported by the rescue services. Governments can play a supporting role in the interest of public safety and reduced health care costs.

Climbers and their organisations should learn from industries such as the aviation industry, where decades of data collection and analysis have led to a constant rush of improvements to technology, systems, procedures, crew training, and human resource management that have turned the inherently dangerous art of flying machines into the safest form of mass transportation.

Some accident reporting systems already exist, and tailored solutions have been tried and tested in different countries. Successful systems have found widespread support in our member communities, and we have the know-how and experience to share.

5. Important principles and concerns

For accident reporting to serve its purpose and the learnings to be readily available, a few important principles should be observed.

- Data collection systems should be operated by a national federation, rescue service, or other organisation that has the capacity to maintain the service in a consistent manner over a long period of time, and the ability to observe the requirements below.
- Data collection can be based on self-submitted reports by involved persons or observers, or by mandated data-collection systems.
- Learning requires an accurate representation of the significant facts for proper analysis, and the analysis work must be qualified, unbiased, and non-judgmental.
- Community adoption is crucial for self-reporting systems, and measures must be taken to build trust, above all by respecting privacy and demonstrating communal benefit.
- To respect privacy and avoid judgment, the anonymity of observers and victims must be preserved. Self-reporting systems should have moderation policies in place.

- The utility of accident reporting systems depends strongly on their results in terms of safety improvements and climber education. The data must be put to good use and the results communicated timely and effectively.
- Accident reporting results should be communicated in ways suitable for the intended audience. Storytelling communicates lessons, open sharing of experiences creates interest and awareness, and publicly shared data and analyses provide knowledge. The UIAA catalogue of reporting systems can be consulted for good examples.

The UIAA will provide further guidance and recommendations for the design of accident reporting systems, including data models, user interfaces tailored to different contexts and communities, ways of communicating results, and demonstrated benefits.

6. Legal concerns must not come in the way of safety

We emphasise that the purpose of accident reporting is to understand causes of accidents and improve safety, and not to judge nor place blame. To effectively improve safety and prevent accidents, we must be able to analyse the root causes of all accidents, even if subjective causes such as human mistakes or equipment design flaws are involved.

Achieving this purpose requires all vital data and information to be readily available for analysis. If accident reporters are reluctant to disclose information for fear of litigation or public reactions, the root causes might remain undetected, and safety work will be compromised.

Thus, a fundamental principle of effective safety work is that everyone must be allowed to report accidents, incidents, and mishaps without fear of litigation, prosecution, or shaming, and, if desired, to remain anonymous. Openly sharing one's mistakes should be commended by the community, not condemned.

Some nations will have legislation or insurance regulations that could raise concerns about liabilities among climbers, guides, and others involved in accidents. While all accident reporting systems must reflect the legal requirements and constraints under the pertinent jurisdiction, it is important that liability concerns do not limit the amount or quality of data available for analyses.

When necessary, appropriate means available under the given jurisdiction should be applied to secure the flow of data, such as preservation of anonymity, appropriate waivers, separation of open and sensitive data, or other. What is important is, that climbers, mountaineers and rescuers are allowed to regard accident reporting and data sharing as a common responsibility, not a liability.

Reporting does not change the facts about the accident, nor the individual agents' responsibilities under the "duty of care"¹. If accidents are caused by negligence or criminal acts, they are to be investigated independently. This should not interfere with any reporting aimed at improving climbing safety.

¹ A duty of care is a legal obligation of an individual to adhere to a standard of reasonable care to avoid careless acts that could foreseeably harm others.

7. Accident reporting is a moral obligation

Safety in mountain sports is a shared responsibility for individuals and organisations alike. The safety and well-being of all who venture into the mountains depend on our willingness and ability to report, analyse, and disseminate information about accidents and near misses.

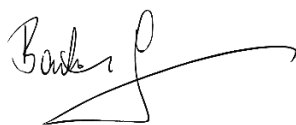
We therefore consider accident reporting and data sharing to be a moral obligation and a cornerstone of responsible practice. The undersigned organisations urge all members and stakeholders to establish and maintain systems for the systematic collection, registration, and open sharing of accident and incident data. Together, we can foster a culture of transparency, learning, and safety for all who enjoy the mountains.

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Signatures



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