

BRAKES

A New Acronym for Rappel Safety Checks

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After a friend had a rappel accident in 2003 I began rewriting the comprehensive treatise titled "*Rappel and Lowering Safety & Techniques for Climbing*". As part of that writing process I created a new memory aid for conducting a final safety check on rappels. It reminded me of highway signs on big steep grades which read, "Steep Hill Check Your Brakes". This short article is taken from the larger work which has not yet be released to the public.

BRAKES is designed to be a quick final check. Before you declare a rappel station "good to go", give the entire system a complete safety check using the BRAKES acronym.

B - Starting with your harness, be sure the **Buckles** on your harness are buckled and doubled back as required.

R - Check your carabiner and **Rappel device**. On double rope rappels, make sure both strands of rope go through the device. Check that the Rope goes properly through the master knot or rappel ring.

A - Check the **Anchor**, starting at the protection pieces through the cord and webbing, paying particular attention to the knots. Be sure they are tight, with adequate tails and well dressed.

K - Check each and every **Knot** in the entire system.

E - Be sure the Ends of your rope are equal, reach the ground and are not kinked along the way. Tie knots in the end if there is any chance you could rappel off the line.

S - Use an appropriate **Safety backup or belay** if there is any chance you may go out of control or have problems. Look for **Sharp edges** anywhere in the entire system.

Touch each component and speak out loud as you do your checks. Verify your checks with your partner and make sure you have not left anything out. If it all checks out and your partner concurs, then proceed with caution and enjoy life on the line.