

Signage & Documentation In Legal Claims In Indoor Climbing Gyms

November 3, 2025

in [CWA Blog](#)



Article Brought to You by Monument Sports Group

Signage and documentation in indoor climbing gyms serve many purposes. These include a gym's policies, procedures, and training materials, and all have different functions.

Clearly defined gym rules, warnings regarding the risks involved in activities, and education of users are all important and valid considerations when reviewing your policies on signage and documentation. Something easily overlooked when examining signage: the legal implications when reviewing claim scenarios.

Starting with Industry Practices

The CWA recently published the [Industry Practices, 4th Edition](#), and this is a great place to start. Policies regarding signage for indoor climbing gyms have been more clearly defined and explained with a focus on risk management, education, and claims defense. This includes proper documentation, focusing on a wide range of materials.

Monument Clients: Receive a Free Copy of Industry Practices!

Review this document carefully; there may be recommended changes for individual policies and procedures. While the focus of this article is on signage and documentation, the Industry Practices, 4th Edition, should be reviewed in its entirety.

Signage

Appropriate signage in the climbing gym has always played an integral part of the facility's climbing education and risk management policies. Rules-related signage assists in informing visitors and members about the policies and procedures of the facility. Personal responsibility is front and center for any great rules-based signage.

Section 2.6 of Industry Practices, 4th Edition, expands on signage use in facilities (as compared to the 3rd Edition) by specifying that activity-specific rules and warning signage are in proximity to the applicable activities.

Simply maintaining basic rules or warning signage at the entrance or at the front desk will not suffice, and facilities should maintain warning signage relevant to specific activities in those areas of the facility.

Bouldering-related signage detailing rules, warnings, and the risks of the activities should be displayed throughout areas of the gym where bouldering is permitted. These should include policies regarding minimum age, reminders about 'every fall being a ground fall', and any facility-specific details, such as downclimb policies if topping out is allowed.

In a claim scenario, plaintiff counsel may seek to imply that the injured party was not aware of the specific policies of the facility or understanding of the risks involved. **Clearly posted signage can be referred to in defense of the facility**, especially regarding the user's assumption of risk.

Gyms should also maintain signage clearly describing the grading policies of the bouldering routes, so that users have a clear understanding of the difficulty of the climb they are attempting. In the event an injured party makes the claim that the route difficulty was not clearly explained or defined, having clear signage in place to refer to may aid in claim defense.

Since route difficulty is subjective, it is recommended that signage address this point for users. Posting your facility's grading system while also mentioning that difficulty can vary between climbs – even in the same grade – may help you in the long run.

Appropriate signage is not limited to bouldering activities in the facility, and gyms should have relevant signage in all activity areas of the facility. Signage can be expanded to aid in claim defense.



For example, in areas with auto belays, one concern is a failure to clip in scenario. Gyms may consider the placement of warning signage at critical fall heights of an auto belay route as a final reminder to the user to check if they are properly clipped in. At critical fall heights, install signage stating, "STOP! ARE YOU CLIPPED IN CORRECTLY?!"

Signage is not a replacement for instruction, proficiency assessment, and documentation.

However, signage can be used as part of a claim defense along with the gym's documentation to counter claims. These can involve accusations of not knowing, not being aware of, or not understanding the policies and procedures of the facility and its activities.

External User Documentation

The adage of "It's not what you know, it's what you can prove" is a key driver in court cases when it comes to proper documentation. While much of the focus is on new customer onboarding, education, training, and testing, proper documentation also involves internal policies on staff training and assessment.

Did You Know?

[CWA Just Released Belay Orientation Videos. Explore them here](#)



Section 1.3 of the Industry Practices, 4th Edition, specifies that the facility maintains current and orderly operation records, including guest information and copies of all facility agreements. An important part of this section is that the gym maintains a retention policy with the ability to retrieve records, including records of all proficiency tests, orientations, and assessments. One point to clarify is the use of the term "guest."

The definitions contained within the Industry Practices differentiate between a Guest and a Participant. A Guest is "A person granted access to a Facility, whether or not such person is a

Participant,” and a Participant is “A Guest that takes part in climbing activities at a facility”. ‘Guests’ entering the facility should have a properly executed facility agreement on file that can be retrieved in the event of an incident/claim.

If the ‘guest’ experiences an injury in the facility, it is not expected that the gym will have records of an orientation or proficiency assessment to aid in the defense of a claim. The facility agreement may be one of the only items available, along with proper signage, to help defend a claim involving a ‘guest’ not participating in activities.

For example, if a guest falls on a wet floor, we can ask questions about having a proper agreement on file, as well as wet floor signage as a warning to the user.

Facility agreements can be used in conjunction with signage to aid in the defense of a bodily injury claim.

Internal Documentation

Documentation is not limited to just user data when it comes to claim defense. Properly documenting all aspects of your staff training, facility maintenance, and equipment. For example:

- **Abuse Prevention** – In the event of an accusation, does the facility have documented records of employment applications, abuse prevention training, and employee background checks?
- **Equipment Failure** – In the event the injured party makes the accusation that the injury stemmed from facility-owned equipment failure, does the gym maintain proper inspection and maintenance logs including auto belays, belay devices, ropes, harnesses, etc.? Does the gym regularly check flooring for tears and dead spots in the foam and record proof of inspection and any mitigation measures taken?
- **Staff Training** – In the event of an accusation of the quality of instruction, does the gym have proof of staff training and proficiency with a documented curriculum for classes? Consider the impact of gym staff maintaining professional certifications such as CWI, Work at Height, Coaching, etc., when defending a claim.
- **Staff Injuries off the Clock** – Most gyms allow staff to climb in the facility when not working. In the event a staff member is injured off the clock, they would be treated like any other participant in the facility, as opposed to being eligible for Workers’ Compensation. Does the facility have proper documentation for onboarding the staff member as a participant, including Facility Agreements, Orientations, and properly documented proficiency assessments?

In closing, there are a variety of claim scenarios where appropriate signage and maintaining proper documentation will be key elements for the defense team.

Gyms can start by reviewing the 4th Edition of The Industry Practices in their entirety against their own policies and procedures.

As a decision maker, you should not discount the importance of signage and documentation in defense of litigation.

Get Your ClimbSmart Posters!

ClimbSmart, an affiliate brand to the CWA, has a whole host of posters for risk management in your facility. From auto belay safety, bouldering, hygiene, and more, ClimbSmart is a great way to keep your gym full of appropriate signage for situations discussed in this article.

[Check Them Out](#)

About Monument Sports Group



and hip replacement surgeries.

Mark Grossman is the Founder and President of The Monument Sports Group, which has been servicing the insurance and risk management needs of professional and amateur sports teams, leagues, facility owners, and players since 2000. In 2013, Monument Sports became the endorsed insurance provider for the CWA, and MSG is very proud of the CWA program. Mark was a five-sport letter winner in high school and played soccer when not hurt at The University of North Carolina. Mark is now able to start climbing despite being really old as he has successfully recovered from knee



William Jorgensen, AAI is the CWA Program Manager for Monument Sports. Will was first introduced to climbing on his journey to earn Eagle Scout and hasn't looked back. He was an Academic All-Conference Soccer Player at Ferrum College, and spent his weekend climbing in the backwoods of Virginia & North Carolina. Will completed his MBA at Ohio University, where he is also pursuing a Master's Degree in Business Analytics. Will works directly with climbing gyms to help them secure insurance coverage.



**THE CHALLENGES OF SAFETY IN
SPORT IMPLEMENTATION**

November 16, 2025

**CWA HIRES EDUCATION
PROGRAM MANAGER**



November 3, 2025