

Safety notice regarding SPARROW self-braking descender

While performing a rescue training during an IRATA course, a Sparrow self-braking descender was damaged because of a wrong and improper usage.

Description of the event

The Sparrow descender was installed to an anchor and the rescuer was lowering the casualty to the ground. Approx weight of the casualty 90 kilograms. During the descent, the casualty remained accidentally caught to one of the anchors placed along the way. To free himself, carelessly, he grabbed the control rope (the rope which passes through the braking spur of the Sparrow for extra friction) and lifted himself on it. In doing so, the braking spur acted as a lever and consequently, the metal component suffered an abnormal load that caused the metal frame to break locally.

Considerations and precautionary measures

The analysis of the event shows that:

- the failure was caused by a manoeuvre not included in those shown as permitted in the User manual and therefore to be considered improper and wrong;
- the local failure of the frame did not expose the casualty to any risk of falling;
- the device proved full compliance with the essential applicable safety standards.

Climbing Technology have however considered that the possibility of a component failure of the descender is a weak point for the product and therefore have taken action by increasing the mechanical strength of the component in which the failure occurred by changing the metallographic structure. Subsequently to this modification a series of tests have been carried out in the CT laboratories, which highlight that in the event of an excessive load on the braking spur, the metal frame remains intact and actually, the braking spur would give way first.

Climbing Technology would like to thank the IRATA training centre for reporting the event with an accurate description: it is an important contribution to improving the performance of our products.

We were also pleased to read in our customer's report that:

"beyond this incident our instructors and our climbers are very happy with the quality and ease of use of the Sparrow descender".

