



Descender incident – near miss - failure to check catch on side plate.

During an IRATA training course, two Level 1s were practising a snatch rescue (for the third time) about three metres from ground, using a single set of ropes with a Petzl Stop descender and a Petzl Shunt as a back-up device.

As the rescuer lowered on the casualty's Stop to bring the casualty's weight on to the rescuer's Stop, the working line suddenly came out of the Stop with a loud noise, leaving both Level 1s suspended from the rescuer's Shunt. The unclosed Stop had held the rescuer's weight up to this point. The Level 1s were quickly removed to ground with no ill effects, apart from minor rope burns to the rescuer's hand. The Stop side plate was bent, so the Stop was discarded and all other equipment quarantined for close examination.

Incident analysis/ control measures/ lessons to learn

The rescuer had threaded the Stop correctly and locked it correctly, but had **not checked that the black spring catch on the side plate was correctly closed.**

The Shunt had been correctly positioned throughout the exercise and worked as intended. There was no discernable slippage or damage to the Shunt.

To protect against this type of incident occurring again, the following additional control measures are recommended:

- 1 All devices with such catches should have a visual and audible check to ensure that they have clicked shut. This should be part of a buddy/ trainer check.
- 2 In such a training environment it is crucial that adequate levels of supervision are maintained, particularly in situations using live casualties with inexperienced candidates. Appropriate supervision could have avoided this incident.
- 3 It is recommended that the following operational checks are standardised during IRATA training and expected at assessment and by supervisors in work situations.

Standard operational checks before descent

(Where possible this should be part of a buddy/ trainer check and is applicable to all descender/ backup device combinations).

- 1 **'Pre-use check' of equipment:** visual/ tactile/ functional (see manufacturer's instructions).
- 2 If at the top, attach an anchor lanyard (cow's tail) to an anchor during a 'function test'.
- 3 Attach the back-up device to the safety line and maintain it in a high position without manipulation until all checks described below have been completed.
 - (a) Check the back-up device attachment karabiner is correctly closed;
 - (b) Check for correct attachment and orientation of the back-up device on the safety line (i.e. not upside down), by pulling on the device lanyard (cow's tail).

- 4 Attach the descender
 - (a) Descender karabiner is correctly closed, with the opening towards user & pointing down;
 - (b) Working line is threaded into the descender as illustrated on descender;
 - (c) The catch on descender side plate is fully closed, if one is present. Otherwise check instructions for correct installation of the device on harness or anchor.
- 5 **Function test /Descent test** (mini abseil)

Finally unlock the descender with a secure grip on the control rope and do a150-200mm descent with the back-up device in a high position, without being manipulated until the descent system is found to be O.K.