

CWA Publishes Landmark Fourth Edition Of Industry Practices For The Indoor Climbing Industry

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In a significant milestone for the indoor climbing industry, the CWA has officially released the **Fourth Edition of the Industry Practices (IPs)**, ushering in a new era of climbing-specific operational guidance for the North American climbing gym industry and beyond. This latest revision is not just an update, it is a comprehensive reimagining of the practices that help define, guide, and elevate the indoor climbing industry.

[Access The New IPs Here](#)

Meeting the scale and maturity the industry has achieved, the CWA, through its Industry Practices Committee, embarked on an ambitious project: to rebuild the IPs from the ground up—starting from a clean slate, rather than simply revising the existing document.

The result is a forward-looking, meticulously crafted document designed for the unique realities of modern climbing operations. The new IPs will also be consistently maintained and updated by the CWA and the Industry Practices Committee.

You can expect major revisions every two years, with the potential for minor updates when necessary to support the industry.

For more than a decade, the CWA's IPs served the industry as general guidelines that helped shape an industry still in its early stages. Since the Third Edition's release in 2007, the landscape of indoor climbing gyms has undergone a dramatic transformation and now includes a full spectrum from smaller gyms to sprawling multi-facility operations and elite climbing-specific training centers. The equipment, techniques, regulatory landscape, and access to training and education have all evolved.

Since 2007, the number of indoor climbing gyms in North America has more than doubled, climbing appeared for the first time at the 2020 Olympic Games, and mainstream interest in the sport has reached new heights.

This growth has been matched by a shift in the profile of gym owners and operators—from passionate climbers opening community gyms, often as their first business venture, to professional operators with experience in business operations.

In this context, the CWA recognized that the previous document, while foundational, no longer met the needs of an increasingly diverse and professionalized industry.

"The Third Edition served the industry well at a time when most operators were new not only to running climbing gyms but to running businesses in general," says Garnet Moore, Executive Director of the CWA.

"Now, we see highly specialized climbing facilities, multi-location operators, and an industry with far more expertise. The Fourth Edition reflects this evolution by focusing exclusively on climbing operations."

Because of this change in expertise, the CWA Industry Practices Committee made the bold decision to start fresh, discarding the older document's business management and general recreation components.

This allowed the committee to create a purpose-built set of practices, written specifically for climbing facilities and operations, free from the assumptions or frameworks of other industries.

The new IPs intentionally exclude general business practices and instead focus entirely on climbing-specific operations. This shift **acknowledges that today's operators have access to a wealth of general business resources through experience, consultants, and other sources but need unified**, comprehensive information to reference dedicated solely to the intricacies of managing climbing-specific risk, programming, staffing, and routesetting.

"The Fourth Edition is by climbers, for climbers—created by those who truly understand the nuances of climbing operations," emphasized Garnet Moore.

"It ensures that our industry has clear, relevant, and defensible practices that respect the sport's culture of personal responsibility while promoting safe and responsible operations."

The Industry Practices Committee has been central to the success of this program, a cross-section of industry leaders representing a range of backgrounds—from operators of large and small facilities to legal experts, academic professionals, and risk managers. This diverse group brought together years of hands-on experience and insight to ensure that the Fourth Edition was both comprehensive and practical.

The committee members include:

- **Mike St. Laurent**, Committee Chair, Triangle Rock Club
- **George Poulton**, Committee Vice Chair, GCMP Law LLC
- **Garnet Moore**, Committee Secretary, CWA
- **Kenneth Cronin**, Crag X Climbing Centre
- **John Heshka**, Thompson River University
- **Chris Jenkins**, Movement Gyms
- **Jason Kurten**, Texas A&M University Rec. Sports
- **Jason Noble**, Vertical Endeavors, Inc.
- **Wesley Shih**, Sender One Climbing, LLC
- **Lauren Watson**, Ground Up Climbing Centre

This team's broad perspective ensured that the IPs are adaptable to a variety of facility models—from collegiate recreation centers and grassroots indoor climbing gyms to regional chains and world-class climbing centers.

In addition to the core Industry Practices Committee members, additional consultation was provided by Monument Sports Group, the administrator of the [CWA's Insurance Program](#), and reviewed by third-party attorneys.

The IPs should serve to support climbing gyms in having responsible operations and aid in preventing incidents and defending claims. The support of legal and insurance partners was invaluable in achieving that goal.

"Having voices from so many different corners of the industry was crucial," noted Garnet Moore.

"We debated, challenged, and collaborated, always considering the wide diversity of facilities, communities, and climbing cultures."

All of the CWA's work is accomplished with this diversity in mind and requires extensive commitment from a large number of volunteers.

If you would like to participate in projects like this, you are encouraged to learn more and apply on the CWA Website.

One of the key philosophies carried through into the Fourth Edition is the preservation of the climbing culture's emphasis on personal responsibility. While the IPs outline rigorous and professionalized operational practices, the document also recognizes that climbing is a risky activity, and that fostering climber awareness and risk management is essential to the sport's integrity and growth.

The Fourth Edition explicitly focuses on climbing gyms that offer recreational and competitive indoor climbing, leaving operations such as "clip and climb", amusements, or inflatable climbing walls outside its scope.

This ensures that the practices remain relevant and tailored to facilities where climbers are expected to engage meaningfully with risk. Likewise, unstaffed climbing facilities are not addressed specifically in the Fourth Edition. The IPs may apply to many of the climbing activities and operations at unstaffed facilities, but additional or different practices may be necessary when operating without any staff present.

Beyond serving as a guide, the Fourth Edition of the IPs is also intended to be a living document. The CWA has committed to ongoing updates, reviews, and supplements as the climbing wall industry continues to evolve.

"The IPs are not a static checklist, and are meant to be broad," remarked Garnet Moore.

"They are a foundation for operators to build upon, allowing the flexibility to innovate while ensuring that the core risk management and responsibility in climbing remains solid."

With the publication of the Fourth Edition, the CWA encourages all climbing wall operators—whether long-established gyms or new entrants to the industry—to use and regularly review the IPs as part of their operational framework. By doing so, operators will be helping to strengthen the industry's collective standards, promote climber responsibility, and ensure the



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