STANDARD:

If offered, COPE or climbing programs are operated safely and in compliance with the policies of the Boy Scouts of America, Association for Challenge Course Technology Standards (Design, Performance, and Inspection; Operations; and Training), and other governing jurisdiction regulations.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE STANDARD:

A. Program Equipment

1. All specialized equipment needed for conducting a safe COPE and/or climbing program must be available to participants and staff members and approved by a qualified person. Personal climbing helmets and harnesses may be used if inspected and approved by the on-site Level II instructor or director. All equipment and cordage must be used, inspected, and retired according to the manufacturer’s recommendations. In the absence of a manufacturer’s recommendation, all soft goods must be retired no more than 10 years from the date of purchase.

2. Each participant and staff member in the fall zone of a climbing site or COPE high-course site must wear a rock-climbing helmet. Observation areas for onlookers must be outside of the fall zone.

3. A written log of the history of each climbing rope used in the program must be kept, indicating (a) the date the rope was purchased; (b) the date the rope was placed in service; and (c) any environmental, severe, or unusual stresses that were placed on the rope. All cordage must be uniquely marked and permanently identified.

4. Equipment inventory records are kept, including retirement criteria based on manufacturer’s recommendations.

5. Staff members inspect all program equipment before and after each use and are taught how to inspect equipment for defects that render equipment unsafe for use. Disposal of retired equipment is done in such a way that it cannot be used for life safety systems.

6. When not being used, equipment must be kept in locked, protected storage, away from exposure to sunlight, heat, moisture, chemicals, and destruction or contamination by animals.
COPE AND/OR CLIMBING PROGRAMS

(Revised January 1, 2014)

Applies to:

- Day camp
- Family camp
- Resident camp
- Trek camp
- Specialty-adventure camp
- High-adventure camp
- COPE/Climbing

B. Participant Requirements. Participation in COPE and climbing activities shall comply with the Age-Appropriate Guidelines for Scouting Activities available in the Guide to Safe Scouting. Additionally, program staff shall ensure that all participants have adequate maturity to participate in the activities.

C. Program Operation

1. All COPE and climbing staff use written procedures for:
   - Opening and closing the program site
   - Conducting a site and safety orientation before the program activity
   - Safety during program operation
   - Equipment use
   - Disabling or limiting access to program sites

2. No participant is ever coerced or pressured into attempting an activity. A participant may be encouraged to take the next small step, but the final choice of participation and performance is left entirely up to the individual.

3. The technique of spotting is explained, demonstrated, and practiced before any activity requiring that skill.

4. Prior to any activity using life safety systems, participants are trained in:
   - Proper belaying technique
   - Belay transfers
   - Signal use
   - Equipment use

5. The Level II instructor or director determines if a participant’s safety might be compromised by course conditions, staffing, weather or any other factor, and is empowered to open and close the COPE or climbing program. Staff members are trained to monitor environmental conditions and their effect on participants during challenge activities. Alternative weather-appropriate activities should be available.

6. All participants are top-roped when climbing. When transferring from one belay system to another, a consistent process is used to ensure that the new belay attachment is secure before the old system is disconnected. All rappelling participants use an acceptable rappel belay method.
7. Only trained COPE and climbing staff climbs using lobster claws or similar tether systems to self-belay above the anchor, such as during a staple climb. Load-limiting or fall-arresting devices shall be used in these situations.

8. Measures are in place to provide for the safety of everyone at the program site, including observers. Everyone must be belayed or anchored when within 8 feet of an edge where a fall of more than 6 feet could occur.

9. A consistent process is used by all COPE and climbing staff to ensure that clothing, head protection, environment, connections, and knots are double-checked in any belayed events for staff members and participants. This requirement must also be followed by staff at all times, including setup and takedown of life safety systems.

10. Written incident resolution plans identifying likely emergencies, including rescues, and procedures for resolving them are reviewed with COPE and climbing staff members and rehearsed annually. Plans must address emergency access (see Standard AO-805).

11. At least one person at the program site must have a valid certificate of training in first aid and CPR, and be physically present whenever the program is in operation. If the program site is more than 30 minutes away from an emergency vehicle-accessible roadway, then a person trained to a minimum level of wilderness first aid must be present on the program site.

12. Rescue equipment and medical supplies appropriate for likely incidents must be on-site and accessible when the program is in operation, and at least one person must be trained in the use of all supplies.

D. Temporary Anchor Systems

1. All temporary anchor systems must be fail-proof or backed up and the load equalized. Anchors are placed to provide the most effective protection for both the climber and the belayer.

2. Trees used as anchor points in an anchor system must be well-rooted, healthy, at least 6 inches in diameter at the point of attachment, and protected from damage.
COPE AND/OR CLIMBING PROGRAMS

Applies to:

- Day camp
- Family camp
- Resident camp
- Trek camp
- Specialty-adventure camp
- High-adventure camp
- COPE/Cliff Climbing

INTERPRETATION:

A COPE course is defined as any challenge elements that are part of a challenge course program and artificial climbing structures. Climbing and rappelling programs include natural rock sites and artificial climbing structures. These standards apply to all COPE and climbing activities that are operated by councils and/or their districts at any location and any time of the year. Scouting units wishing to conduct climbing programs should consult the Climb On Safety guidelines and Guide to Safe Scouting. Unit leaders must take Climb On Safety training (available online at scouting.org) prior to taking their units on climbing activities.

Scout camp structures such as monkey bridges, obstacle courses, and pioneering towers are expected to meet safety standards in equipment and supervision comparable to COPE but are not subject to COPE and climbing standards, do not require professional inspection, and do not require an onsite COPE Level II instructor or director. Councils may find their COPE and climbing committee to be a valuable resource for writing operating procedures and providing training for staff who supervise these activities. Age-appropriateness of various COPE and climbing programs is addressed in the Age-Appropriateness Guidelines for Scouting Activities available in the Guide to Safe Scouting and on http://www.scouting.org.

Soft goods: Rope, webbing, cordage, helmets, harnesses, slings, etc.

Proper belay: Belayer’s position must be in direct line with a potential fall and allows for no slack between the anchor point, if used, and the belayer. Backup belayers are required whenever possible. For instances where there is not enough space for a backup belayer, an alternate backup safety measure shall be employed including but not limited to: using trained staff to perform the belay operation, requiring consistent demonstration of belay proficiency prior to belaying alone (belay training card), or using an assisted-braking belay device. Horizontal traversing elements require either a movable dynamic belay system with a belay team or a static belay system using an observer.

Acceptable rappel belay methods: Rigged using a releasable rappel or other belay system that allows participants to be quickly and safely lowered if the rappel device becomes jammed.

- Double-line rappel with an independent belay line
- Single-line rappel with an independent belay line
- Double-line rappel with a fireman’s belay
- Single-line rappel with a fireman’s belay
Some activities employ life safety provisions similar to COPE or climbing (e.g., caving, canyoneering, spar pole climbing, etc.), and may involve the use of equipment and/or techniques that are not covered in typical BSA instructor training. Staff members should consult with experts familiar with and trained in the use of this equipment and these techniques prior to implementing the program. Specific training and assessment for instructors operating these programs must be documented prior to operating these programs.

**VERIFICATION:**

- Observation of procedures in practice
- Evaluation of program documents (may be submitted with declaration):
  - A.3 Rope logs
  - A.4 Equipment record/inventory
    - Including manufacturer’s recommendations for inspection and retirement
  - C.1 Daily orientation and operating procedures
  - C.10 Plans for likely emergencies