



CMC Rescue Technical Report #6

Washing Rope Rescue Equipment

All equipment should be kept clean and free of dirt and grit to prevent wear that will reduce the strength, effectiveness, and life of rescue equipment. After gear has been washed, remember to re-mark it if necessary and log that it has been washed.

Rope & Webbing. Rinse off muddy or especially dirty rope or web with water. A Rope Washer like the ones by SMC or BOKAT makes this step easier. Scrub any tough spots with a nylon bristle brush. Soak the rope in a tub of water with a mild detergent. We recommend a special product made for washing nylon rope, called Lifeline Cleaner, which also works well on turnouts and hoses. Woolite or other mild detergents that are safe for nylon may also be used. The rope can be rinsed using a rope washer or placed directly into the washing machine.

Washing rope and webbing in a top-loading washing machine is the easiest method. Run the empty machine through a cycle with plain water to rinse any harsh detergents from the machine before starting. Use cold water and the appropriate amount of Lifeline Cleaner or detergent.

Double the rope (or web) and “daisy-chain” it. This keeps single lines from tangling or getting caught in the agitator. Put the rope in the machine and wash on the gentle cycle. If the rope bag needs washing, put it in with the rope.

During the rinse cycle, add a small amount of Downy fabric softener. (No more than one ounce of Downy to 3 gallons of water.) The fabric softener replaces the lubricant the rope loses during use and washing.

Air dry the rope and webbing in a cool, shaded place. Do NOT dry nylon products in the sun because of the damaging effects on nylon from prolonged exposure to ultraviolet rays. If necessary, ropes can be stuffed into the bags wet. The ropes may mildew but this does not adversely effect the rope.

Rope that has come into contact with blood or other body fluids can be cleaned using a chlorine bleach per your department’s protocols for decontaminating equipment. Wellington Commercial Cordage states that the small amount of bleach specified in most decontamination protocols will have minimal effect on the rope’s fibers.

Sewn Nylon Gear. The “D” rings and buckles on these tend to damage washing machines. Use Lifeline Cleaner to soak them in a tub. Light scrubbing with a brush should remove heavy dirt deposits. Rinse and air-dry the same as rope and webbing.

Hardware. When necessary, wash hardware in warm, soapy water. Be sure to get all of the dirt out of any moving parts. Rinse and towel or blow-dry. As we mentioned under equipment inspection, the rule against lubricating carabiners and hardware appears to be changing. Use of a dry or non-sticky lubricant following washing may help preserve the life and performance of your hardware.

▣ November 1998, CMC Rescue, Inc.