

ANNUAL INSPECTION FAQs

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1. Why do I need an inspection?

Because you are a good challenge course manager, that's why! As a good challenge course manager, you want to verify the safety of your course and operational equipment. An annual inspection is also a requirement of some insurance companies, and in the event of any accident, you will be judged according to the practices of your peers, which certainly includes an annual course inspection. ACCT standards require an annual inspection by a qualified challenge course professional.

2. Who should conduct inspections?

A visual inspection should be conducted by course facilitators before any and every program begins. A course manager or other trained staff member should also conduct a quarterly "hands-on" inspection of your course. Finally, a "hands-on" inspection should be conducted annually by a qualified challenge course professional, usually a professional vendor member (PVM) of the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT).

3. What is a qualified challenge course professional?

According to ACCT challenge course standards, a qualified challenge course professional "must have experience in installation and evaluation of courses and must follow authoritative sources and peer-accepted practices in installation and inspection." Appendix C of the current ACCT standards contains detailed criteria to consider when choosing such a

qualified professional. Professional Vendor Members (PVMs) of ACCT meet all the requirements for a qualified challenge course professional, as they have gone through an extensive peer review process validating their experience and expertise. Names and contact information for PVMs can be found on ACCT's Web site at www.acctinfo.org.

4. How do I arrange an inspection?

Call the company you have chosen to conduct your inspection for scheduling and billing information. Be prepared to pay for the cost of the inspection plus travel expenses, including travel mileage and/or airfare plus car rental, meals, and lodging expenses. Some companies, including CDI, will allow you to provide accommodations and/or meals for their inspectors in order to cut your cost.

5. What should I expect from my inspector?

Unless you specifically request otherwise, any annual course inspection conducted by a qualified challenge course professional should include a "hands-on" inspection of all operational equipment and all low and high challenge course events, including the wood structures, metal hardware, and the environment surrounding each challenge course element. Additionally, you might want to choose a vendor who is willing to do minor repairs, such as tightening nuts, adjusting cable tension, and adding serving sleeves. Many companies like CDI will do this type of work at no additional charge other

than materials. Following the course inspection, you should receive some type of "initial findings report" that you may be asked to read and sign before the inspector leaves. This serves as temporary written notification of the course and equipment condition and as signed acknowledgement that you are aware of any failed elements or equipment. Finally, you will receive the official inspection report, typically within two to four weeks.

6. What will be included in my inspection report?

An inspection report from any ACCT vendor member should include the following information: date on which the inspection was performed, inspection company and inspector's name, course installation history, previous annual inspection history, list of all elements and equipment inspected and the condition of each, upcoming repairs that may need to be made, and other suggestions or things to monitor on a continual basis. The actual format of the report will vary from vendor to vendor. Some companies will simply grade each item on a pass/fail basis and include suggestions or comments, while others will grade on a continuum using numbers or letters that indicate the specific condition of the item, such as very good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory. If an element is not inspected for any reason, the event should be listed on the report with some notification that it was not inspected at that time. NOTE: If an event is not listed at all, be sure to find out why; it may simply be that if no one was there to show the

inspector the location of the events, he/she simply may not have known it existed!

7. What exactly will the inspector be looking for?

Your inspector will be looking at the condition of all of the hardware and nylon equipment you use to operate your course. He/she will look to see if the equipment is stored properly and if there are any signs of damage to equipment that may be due to improper use or storage. Your inspector will look for the manufacture dates on all equipment containing nylon including ropes, harnesses, prusiks, helmets, and so on, so that he/she can make any retirement recommendations. He/she will also inspect your rope logs to make sure they are complete and up to date.

If your course utilizes utility poles, your inspector will look for the appropriate-sized poles for the course application, appropriate guying, proper installation of poles, pole soundness, and the specific treatment of the pole (CCA or other acceptable treatment rather than creosote).

If your course is built in trees, your inspector will look for the appropriate-sized trees for the course application, species considerations, and signs of potential problems with the health of the tree. Consultation with an arborist may be necessary in some situations. Your vendor will also look at other wood structures on your course, such as platforms, and inspect them for proper bracing and hardware, wood preservative treatment, and structural soundness.

Your vendor should also inspect metal hardware used in construction of your course. The inspector will check for the use of proper bolts for application, tightness of bolts, any damage to bolts, proper align-

ment with the element, and any overgrowth of the bolts from trees in which they are installed. He/she will ensure that the proper cable is used in course construction and that there is appropriate tension on the cables considering its application. Other cable considerations include overloading, corrosion or rust, broken strands, loss of flexibility, and overgrowth from trees. Guy anchors will be checked for any damage or pulling out, and he/she will inspect for the proper construction of guys, taking into consideration their “critical” or “non-critical” status.

8. To what standards will a vendor inspect?

This depends on the practice of the particular vendor. At a minimum, an ACCT PVM should inspect to the ACCT standards. Some companies may additionally inspect to their own standards, which could, in some cases, go above and beyond ACCT’s requirements. This can become a problem if, for example, company A built your course, and you then ask company B to inspect your course. If, in addition to ACCT standards, company B also inspects to its *own* construction standards, the inspector from company B could find fault with someone else’s building practices and *may* even go so far as to fail an event that actually is in accordance with ACCT standards. This does NOT mean you always have to have the same company that built your course inspect your course. It does mean that if you choose a company different than the one who built your course, you should ask to what standards they inspect and how they would handle any situation that meets ACCT standards but not their own (that is, would they fail the event entirely, or would they simply make a recommended change?).

9. Do I have to be present during the inspection?

Cornerstone Designs encourages the presence of a course manager during some part of the inspection process. Questions occasionally arise regarding use or age of operational equipment, course history, or location of an event. In these cases, especially, it is very helpful to have someone on site to whom the inspector can go with questions. You may want to ask if you can walk through the course with the inspector so that he/she can directly show you any areas of concern. If it is not possible for you to be on site the day of the inspection, you may, depending on your vendor, need to reschedule. Cornerstone Designs does not necessarily require the presence of a course manager the day of the inspection; however, we do strongly recommend it, and, in any case, the inspector needs to have *some* point of contact familiar enough with the course and its operations who has the authority to answer questions, give access to the course and equipment, and sign the initial findings report.

10. Should I change vendors occasionally in order to get a “fresh set of eyes” on my course?

Cornerstone Designs does not recommend changing vendors unless you have a specific concern about your present vendor’s practices. There *is* room for interpretation of some standards. Just as would happen if you were having a home inspection, you may find that one inspector will find no problems, while another may find some areas of concern. If you are considering changing vendors, make sure to ask lots of questions and to find out to which standards that company inspects.

**11. The inspection is complete.
Now what do I do?**

If the inspector has indicated that any operational equipment needs to be retired, immediately remove it from the equipment storage area and render it useless so that facilitators cannot accidentally take it onto the course, or elsewhere, and use it. Replace the equipment. Your inspector may give you recommendations for certain equipment if you ask. **Always read and keep any literature accompanying new equipment, and familiarize yourself with the proper use of the equipment and with the appropriate retirement recommendations from the manufacturer.** If you have any questions about the equipment and its recommended use, call the manufacturer and ask! Mark date of manufacture on all nylon equipment and/or in rope or equipment logs.

Request a quote for and schedule any necessary repairs. **If a challenge course element has failed, do not use the element until it has been repaired.** Repairs should be completed by a qualified challenge course professional.