Near miss: Belay/anchor points on the Clifton Suspension Bridge

On 20/02/2017 crews from Stn. 09 Temple and Stn. 15 Bedminster attended a rope rescue incident on the Clifton Suspension Bridge. Following the deployment of rope rescue operators into an area of fall potential it became apparent from information provided by the Bridgemaster that the belay/anchor points in use were not designated load-tested eye bolts. These are instead attachments used for hanging banners and notices on the bridge span (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 The proximity of certified belay points and uncertified banner attachments

- Uncertified banner attachments
- Certified belay/anchor point

This FiRe Alert! should be displayed on workplace notice boards until **21st March 2017** before being removed and filed in the FiRe Alert! archive folder.
Fig. 2 Uncertified banner attachment

These particular attachments are neither appropriately tested or suitably robust for L3 work positioning activities, however they are almost identical in appearance to those provided as part of the safe system of work for similar incidents. There are currently at least 24 such attachments on the bridge, located on both sides of the road and at each end of the bridge span.

The correct designated belay/anchor points can be identified by a small white disc around the thread (also bearing the date of expiry), however in dark conditions and during time-critical operations these can be missed (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Certified belay/anchor points with a white disc around the thread

AFRS is currently liaising with the Bridgemaster with a view to replacing the hanging banner attachments with smaller fixings at the earliest opportunity. This FiRe Alert! serves as a reminder to crews that belay/anchor points used for rope rescue incidents on the Clifton Suspension Bridge must be the designated eye bolts (ensuring that the date hasn’t expired). Alternatively, crews may use structural masonry or certified vehicles as anchor points.
Additionally the black fence posts at each end of the bridge (see Fig. 4), must also **not** be used as belay/anchor points. These posts are unsuitable as they are buried in the ground at a shallow depth and are made of a combination of weak plastic and aluminium.

**Fig. 4** Black fence posts that are not suitable for belay/anchor points.

ACFO Shilton  
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