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*SSK Industries, Inc.*

## Automatic Activation Devices

thoughts by Cliff Schmucker...

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Skydiving is a high-speed, fast-paced sport that can be rather unforgiving in the event of errors in judgment, or unforeseen circumstances. Basically, we intentionally hurtle ourselves at the ground at 120 MPH, in the name of having fun. However, to continue having fun, we have to slow ourselves down to a survivable velocity before landing. That is why we use parachutes. Of course, parachutes can only do their job if we manage to deploy them in time, each and every time we step out of an aircraft.

This letter is an appeal to all skydivers, new and experienced, to seriously consider *equipping their equipment with, and using* an AAD (automatic activation device).

This is now my 20th year in the sport. In looking back over those years, among all the great skydives and events that have occurred, there is the sad task of reflecting on the friends, colleagues, business acquaintances, and other fellow skydivers who are no longer with us, because they were killed participating in the sport that they loved so much.

It is unrealistic for *anyone* to believe that, "It can't happen to me." The fatality reports indicate otherwise. The best skydivers in the world are still human, make occasional mistakes, and can get taken out by someone else, without ever knowing what hit them. Skydiving is somewhat of an odds game, we all make various choices that can affect the chances of our being injured or killed. An AAD is one of those choices.

Major improvements have been made in AADs over the years. Most of the arguments against their usage are no longer applicable. Although certainly not foolproof, they do increase a skydiver's survivability factor. (Carrying a reserve parachute along on every jump also increases our survivability factor, even though most of the time it is a bulky and costly addition to the equipment that we really "need".)

Think of an AAD used with a rig to be similar to a seat belt or air bag in an automobile or a helmet on a motorcycle. They are a hassle to use, they get in the way, they add expense, they infringe on our "personal freedoms", and in bizarre circumstances they sometimes hurt more than they help. But, statistically they save lives. Hopefully, skydivers will voluntarily use AADs before they are mandated by government, as has happened with the other examples.

Finally, I consider an AAD to be cheap insurance. Like other insurance, I hope I never need to use it. Unlike other insurance, it is designed to prevent damage, rather than just attempting to repair damage after the fact.

I have personally been using an AAD for the past 7 years on about 30% of my jumps. Although I had a couple of "misfires", the AAD actually did its job when it was supposed to, I was low. With the introduction of the CYPRES, experienced skydivers do not have to worry as much about an AAD deploying their reserve while they are getting their main out "a little low"; at 800 feet AGL it is time for something. The past two seasons I have used an AAD on 80% of my jumps. I am now beginning to feel uncomfortable skydiving without it. Previously, I thought that it would be rather humiliating for an experienced jumper to be saved by an AAD. Now, I consider the more embarrassing situation to be going in without an AAD, or worse yet having it turned off.

Effective immediately, SSK Industries, Inc. is recommending that everyone purchasing a new Sweethog consider equipping it with an AAD. We also recommend that current owners of Sweethogs consider having an AAD installed on their equipment. Approvals are pending on some of our older models that previously could not use an AAD.

**DISCLAIMER - WARNING:** Because AADs are extremely complicated and sensitive devices, they can fail to perform properly when needed. AADs can theoretically also mis-fire, *causing* severe injury or death, rather than preventing it. Statistically, AADs do increase a skydiver's odds of survival. However, like any other mechanical or electronic safety device, they save more lives when properly installed (using the AAD and harness/container manufacturer's instructions), properly inspected and maintained (per the AAD manufacturer's instructions), and used according to the operating instructions and limitations specified in the AAD's operator manuals.

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