



AUSTRALIAN PARACHUTE FEDERATION

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Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh St
Southbank Victoria 3006



Attention; Ms Hannah Summerhayes

25th May 2015

CORONERS FINDING INTO DEATH WITHOUT INQUEST – MUHAMMAD MOHSIN AZAM – RESPONSE BY AUSTRALIAN PARACHUTE FEDERATION (APF)

Reference: A. Coroners COR 2012 005467 dated 6 February 2015.
B. APF letter to Coroners Court dated 9 March 2015.

Reference A recommends that the Victorian/Tasmanian Parachute Council and the APF give formal consideration to the recommendation that:

- A helmet be required to be worn during any skydiving activity in Victoria; and
- The helmet worn for skydiving activities must comply with a robust design standard (e.g. EN966 or a newly mandated Australian Standard for skydiving helmets).

Following receipt of these recommendations, the APF has consulted with the International (parachute) Federation, discussed the matter at a meeting of the technical committee (APF), further discussed the matter at the annual APF safety conference and sought medical input from a Specialist Surgeon and Senior Lecturer in Clinical Anatomy.

Throughout the investigation, the APF has taken a WH&S investigative approach that is, what is the likelihood of an event like this occurring, and, what are the likely results if it does occur. This investigation was assisted greatly by the considerable experience of committee members, some of whom have participated in 10 – 15,000 parachute descents each.

COMMENT

- Uncertainty about cause and effect flows throughout the witness statements. Even the highly professional Medical Examiner's report is unable to give clear guidance on the circumstances leading to the finding of head injury causing death.
- The APF discussions outlined above, and based on extensive experience, tends to support Mr Murphy's conclusions. That is, a descent rate of around 8 feet (say, 2 meters)/second and a forward speed of, say, 25 knots (around 40 k/hr) resulted in a head strike on the ground.
- The most probable result of a head strike of this nature is a severe deceleration injury as opposed to an impact injury.
- The comment by Ms Gaffney that the impact would have been 'statistically survivable' with a different design helmet is speculative; no one saw the impact or knows its actual nature.
- In FY 2013/2014 the APF conducted 355,217 parachute descents; 326, 232 in FY 2012/2013. The tragic death of Mr Azam is the only incident of this type recorded by the APF.
- The APF already mandates the wearing of helmets up to 'C' licence (100 descents); it is noted that Mr Azam was in compliance with this requirement.

- The type of helmet is not as simple as indicated by Ms Gaffney. Different types of jumps have different requirements; e.g., the requirement to hear shouted commands, the ability to see and identify altimeters, cut away handles, etc, avoidance of neck injury during various opening shock sequences, and so on.
- The APF considers that jumpers having over 100 jumps (and their supervisors) have sufficient experience to judge what type of helmet is most appropriate for their specialty.

CONCLUSIONS

As a direct result of the finding in Reference A, the APF will include the inspection of helmets as part of the annual drop zone audits to determine their suitability for parachute operations, particularly for inexperienced members.

The wearing of helmets is already mandated for up to 'C' licence holders and this is felt to be a suitable level for regulatory purposes.

Mandating a type of helmet is not possible due to the various uses for which they may be required. The APF can, and will, continue to promote safety for its members and can suggest various standards of helmets to its members through the regular magazine.

This reply by the APF is also on behalf of the Victorian/Tasmanian Parachute Council.



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