

Bradford skydiver remembered following fatal jump

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While insisting each of the three skydiving deaths at his parachuting school in the past year are isolated in nature, Adam Mabee also said "all options are on the table" in terms of what to do to prevent more deaths at the facility.

"It's not business as usual and it's not the status quo," he said, in response to questions about if a different approach is being taken to ensure better safety moving forward. "We look at each accident very carefully. We are doing everything we can at this point."

Former instructor and respected Bradford jumper Brad Vale, 39, died Saturday at Georgina's Parachute School of Toronto after attempting the advanced "swooping" landing technique that can reach speeds of 80 km/h.

Vale's Facebook page is filled with pictures of him attempting extreme parachuting in exotic locales and what appears to be tandem diving with inexperienced jumpers strapped to his chest.

He has been involved in more than 2,000 jumps in the past.

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In July 2013, Igor Zaitsev, an advanced parachute student from Toronto, was killed after he landed in a back yard near the school.

The investigation into what happened with Shamrock's parachute is ongoing, according to Mabee, who said experts from the Canadian Forces are investigating the case.

"We're still not certain what happened through the whole accident," he added. "This latest diver had the highest level of certification available. When it comes to experienced jumpers, the onus of safety is primarily left up to the jumpers."

While Mabee admitted three deaths in a year is a particularly bad run, he said he was unsure what steps he could take besides looking into what caused the accident and closing the school for a few days during peak jumping season to "regroup".

Rather than federal agencies fining or shutting down locations, resulting in jumpers simply travelling elsewhere, the best option for a drop zone in this

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ATTEND: A celebration of life will be held at Churchill United, 6300 Yonge St., Churchill, July 18 at 6 p.m. followed by a reception at Skydive Toronto, 3065 4th Line, Cookstown.

situation is to bring in a safety consultant, parachute manufacturer and former X-Games jumper Brian Germain said, in an interview from Washington, D.C.

"Usually, when there is a rash of accidents, most of the time it's just poor luck," he said. "Everyone wants to point the finger and promote safety through the eradication of a weak link, but sometimes, that's not possible. Sometimes, the best thing is to have a safety course by a professional who does that kind of thing for a living."

The good news for the school is the divers who died were all experienced, he said.

"It's a bad year, but the fact that it's not the same thing over and over is a reasonable sign that there isn't a problem with training," said Germain, who has more than 15,000 dives under his belt. "If it's all experienced divers, then we have to look at follow-up training."

The truth of the matter is swooping can be exciting, but is very dangerous, he added.

"It's usually a result of people making poor piloting decisions," he said.

Since automatic activation devices were installed in parachutes, swooping has been one of the leading causes of skydiving-related death for experienced jumpers, said Germain, who has conducted training at the school in the past.

Mabee said the death has been difficult for him and his organization, estimating he hosts hundreds of experienced jumpers each year.

"Anything like this is going to hit very hard," he said.

Organizations investigating the most recent death include police, coroner's office, Transportation Ministry and Canadian Sport Parachuting Association.

Using the hashtag #BSBD, which stands for blue sky black death, a parachuting expression that reminds jumpers of the paradox of the sport, Twitter users have been expressing their sorrow about Vale's passing.

Stephanie Rowe, under the name @BKKSteph, wrote: "#BSBD Brad".

Husa Idrees noted: "#BSBD my heart is in my throat".

Chelsea Stephen wrote: "My thoughts are with all of my wonderful, amazing skydiving friends. #bsbd".

Vale's funeral will take place at Skwarchuk Funeral Home in Bradford.



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Adam Mabee, owner of Parachute School of Toronto in Baldwin, said that his school is examining what went wrong in three skydiving deaths to improve safety measures in the future.



FACEBOOK

Photographs from Brad Vale's Facebook page show his love for the sport. Vale was killed last weekend during a jump. He is centre in this photograph.