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July 11, 1999

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DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION

Department of Transportation Dockets  
Docket No. FAA-99-5483  
400 Seventh Street SW  
Room Plaza 401  
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Comment to Department of Transportation, Federal  
Aviation Administration, Notice of Proposed Rule making, 14  
CFR Parts 65, 91, 105, and 113, Parachute Operations:

Docket No. FAA-99-5483-25

To whom this may concern,

My Interest in the FAA's notice of proposed rule making on Parachute Operations, which is known as Skydiving, goes back to my sisters death on January 19, 1991. She packed her own chute but had made a comment on the plane that the ripcord did not seem right but the Jump Master said it was OK. They still allowed her: to jump from the airplane. She pulled her ripcord a few times and it would not deploy the main or reserve parachutes. Where were the Laws (Regarding Safety) that could have protected her from jumping that day that could have saved her life?

Why does the Drop Zones or any Skydiving events that collect money for a profit get the right to be Waived of any responsibility because they do not have to, and because they CAN'T get Insurance because of it being non-existent. Lloyd's of London won't carry Skydiving Insurance but they will cover Bunggee Jumping still as of 1993. I know this because I called them. (Where is the SAFETY in this?)

There seems to be a loophole in the system as to who is in fact. responsible for handling Safety Reports in incidents that result in any Physical Injury or, in my sisters case DEATH. It seems to be a CATCH-22. (Interesting isn't it?)

My understanding is that the FAA isn't required to REGULATE the Safety of the Drop Zones or any Skydiving events. The U.S.P.A seems to want to make up their own rules, thus it becomes convenient for them to Waive responsibility for their own Safety actions that result in ANY PhysicalInjures or DEATH and put the student at FAULT. I can not understand why this Catch-22 between the Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration andthe U.S.P.A be CLOSED for the SAFETY of all Skydivers.

Enclosed is an article that was in the Freelance Star Newspaper in Richmond, VA for which Jane Melbourne and I tried to get a Law passed. We did succeed, but the Insurance requirement part of it we could not succeed in. Also enclosed is an editorial article out of Skydiving Magazine in February 1998 issue. (Seems like they still have their heads under water:.

We don't need lobbyist to try and make our point. We just want to be heard. If my voice can be heard at least I know that I have tried to make a difference. (I just could save a life and know that it is because of STRICTER STUDENT SAFETY for all involved).

In conclusion I don't want to see the Proposed changes enacted until the Proposal includes regulations for STUDENT SAFETY. Thank you for hearing my voice. I may make a difference.

Sincerely,



DEBORAH ANN CHASE

Washington ~~Post~~ Jan 20, 1991

## AROUND THE REGION



SUSAN CHASE

... fell to her death skydiving

review and preparation beforehand, said her sister, Sharon Kelly.

"We all believe it just snagged," Kelly said. "We don't want anyone to think it was her fault or anybody else's," she said.

A spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration said the incident is under investigation. Chase is survived by a 4-year-old daughter.

A trust fund for the child has been started by Church of the Resurrection at 2280 N. Beauregard St. in Alexandria, a family member said.

### Witness: Parachute Failed

A Falls Church woman who fell to her death while skydiving Saturday in Stafford County tried to pull the rip cord of her parachute, but the chute did not open, a witness said yesterday.

Susan Chase, 29, died on hitting the ground. "She made numerous attempts at her main parachute and several at her reserve. She ran out of time," said Paul Oczkowski, 32, who was in the air with Chase and was her instructor on the jump.

It was Chase's 17th jump, and she had undergone two hours of

Feb 2 1993 Freelance Star News press

# Sky-diving risks hard to handle

By JIM TOLER  
Staff Reporter

**RICHMOND**—Susan Chase died in a sky-diving accident two years ago at Hartwood Airport in western Stafford County. Yesterday, her sister, visibly upset, urged a Senate committee to require parachute centers to carry insurance for such accidents.

"I'd like them to be more responsible," said Deborah Chase of Falls Church, her voice shaking. She said making parachute centers carry insurance on student jumpers would ensure that they would be more careful.

"She was 29 years old and left a 4-year-old little girl behind," Chase said after the public hearing.

To demonstrate the devil-may-care attitude among some parachutists, she pulled from a plastic bag, a "sky diver's emergency kit" that consisted of small dustpan and a spatula.

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*'The facts are, there's simply no insurance in the United States for this market. We couldn't pass a bill requiring insurance that did not exist.'*

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Sen. Elliot S. Schewel

Chase said her sister's jump master gave the kit to their mother as a Christmas present before Susan Chase plunged 10,000 feet to her death when she couldn't open her chute.

"That's a little bit sick," said Sen. Charles J. Colgan, D-Manassas, chairman of the Labor and Commerce Committee. "But you can't legislate good manners?"

The committee also determined that it couldn't require the insurance

Deborah Chase was pleading for.

"The facts are, there's simply no insurance in the United States for this market," said Sen. Elliot S. Schewel, D-Lynchburg, who sponsored the bill at the request of a constituent whose son died while sky-diving in Massachusetts a few years ago. "We couldn't pass a bill requiring insurance that did not exist."

However, Sen. John H. Chichester, R-Stafford County, who serves on the

panel, said the legislature can see that student parachutists understand the risks of the sport.

"As the alternative, we thought we'd make sure patrons were notified in writing that that insurance doesn't exist," he said.

Sen. Richard L. Saslaw, D-Springfield, said that shouldn't be necessary. He said parachutists should "know from the get-go that [centers] have no liability to cover them. They should know they're getting into a dangerous sport."

But Chichester, who owns an insurance agency and is a former pilot, said the notification requirement should make the insurance situation very clear. He said he knows the measure provides little comfort for relatives of sky divers who have died.

Please see *Chuting*, page B2

Relatives of victims aren't the only ones dissatisfied with the legislature's approach.

Jason Bell, a spokesman for the Alexandria-based U.S. Parachutists Association, told the committee it opposes the insurance notification requirement.

"We're saying there's not a problem right now, so what's the point in creating a law that requires time and taxpayers' money to maintain? You're going to pass a law and fix nothing," he said. "People sign a waiver [before they jump] and they know there's probably no coverage."

He explained that jump schools have insurance to cover damage sky divers might do to private property, but there is no way parachute schools can cover the jumpers themselves.

Bell said the parachuting center at Hartwood airport on the Stafford-Fauquier County line is one of the oldest in the state.

When Susan Chase died there Jan. 19, 1991, she was the private airport's first fatality in 23 years. The aviation center owned by Harry Schoelpple reported training about 1,000 parachutists annually. About 10,000 jumps are made there each year.

According to Federal Aviation Administration investigators, Chase, who was making her 17th jump, was

supposed to pull her rip cord at 3,500 feet, but never did. The investigation found no faulty equipment.

Schoelpple, who owns the parachuting center where the accident occurred, spoke against the idea of mandatory insurance for the industry.

The people who skydive, like the people who engage in mountain climbing or scuba diving or motorcycling or dozens of other activities, know full well the risks involved, said Schoelpple, and they calculate and accept those risks.

"Everybody who skydives signs a agreement not to sue," he said.

Deborah Chase said her sister's death demonstrates that jumpers are on their own.

"They should never have allowed her to go up in the air. The day she died she had made the comment that she was afraid her chute wouldn't open. They still continued to allow her to jump out of that plane," she said.

The threat of having their insurance rates go up could make operators more careful, she contended. "My feeling is, had they been more liable and carrying more insurance they would have been a little more cautious about letting her jump out of that plane? ..."

The bill to require notification about the insurance will now go to the Senate floor for action.

Important Save

Jan. 23, 1998

Dear Debbie,

It was good to talk to you.

I thought you'd be interested in this editorial in Skydiving, February, 1998 that I read this week. I am delighted that the skydiving industry is so angry at 20/20.

To me, their anger means the program hit home.

MFT, I believe, is Michael Truffer, publisher of Skydiving - something of a misogynist!

Love,

Jane

Skydiving  
Feb. 1 1998

# EDITORIAL

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-364-7888

## Is the Head Dead Yet?

If you were lucky, you missed the "20/20" episode entitled "Skydivers **Beware** — Is Your Parachute Safe?

Here's how the December 20 broadcast opened, with Barbara Walters **staring** at the camera, her hair looking as if had been styled by a cherry bomb that had gone-off at scalp level:

"**Picture**, if you can, jumping out of a plane and free falling at 120 miles an hour — **the** wind in your face, your heart in your throat,\* Walters solemnly intoned. "The only thing that separates you from death is that parachute on **your** back. Well, people who skydive say they can never forget the thrill. I'll bet. And statistics show that skydiving is really pretty safe. But Tom **Jarriel** tells us that when your life is in someone else's hands, you'd better know something about them [sic]."

The program went on, deftly painting an ugly picture of our **sport**. **Although "20/20" reporters were careful to mention** — almost **under** their breath — that skydiving actually has **become** safer in recent years, the program was obviously edited to support their preconceived conviction that skydiving is an unregulated **sport** where the equipment is shoddy and the riggers incompetent. **The** FAA was made to look weak and ineffective. **USPA** executive director Chris **Needels was** quoted several times, always slightly or grossly out of context.

I suppose I should be accustomed to our sport being portrayed like this, even by — or **especially** by — network TV. We jumpers tend to throw up our hands when such crap gets broadcast into our living rooms. After all, commercial television concluded years ago that it couldn't make money unless it sensationalized and "packaged" **the** news.

I've **reacted** by being more selective about what I watch. I try not to watch local news programs, and I especially avoid programs like "20/20" and "60 Minutes," opting instead for sports and, get this, sitcoms. After watching the hack job news programs do on skydiving, I don't believe what they tell me about subjects I know little about.

Broadcast journalism doesn't have to distort and mislead, but network TV doesn't seem to know that.

Consider, for instance, the coverage of the South Pole accident. **If** you watched network TV, you saw Bryant Gumbel try to grill Bill Booth with one **dimwitted** question **after another**. **It was clear Gumbel's main goal was to inject** as much drama into the moment as possible. (You also saw Booth respond cheerfully and calmly; he did a superb job.)

But National Public Radio took an even-handed approach to the accident. **NPR's** Bob Edwards interviewed survivor Michael Keams, asking him pertinent questions and giving **Keams** enough time to answer each fully. NPR did a good job and served as a neutral conduit of the news. Listeners were left with a better understanding of what went wrong in Antarctica.

What to do? For starters, don't watch the so-called news programs, and don't buy anything from the companies that advertise on them.

When you do see, hear or read crummy coverage of our sport, pitch a bitch. Complain to advertisers, the network and the local station. Call, send letters or **email** your objections. Don't be too rabid — you'll catch more flies with honey than vinegar — but get your point across. Do it every time.

**Also**, tell **USPA** and the Parachute Industry Association that you want more of your dues spent on public relations. Although **USPA's** PR program has improved in the last few years, it still is quite pathetic. It won't get better unless the membership speaks up. And, believe me, both organizations have the money to spend.

In the meantime, I'll take **you** back to the end of **the "20/20" episode** on skydiving. Tom **Jarriel starts** the wrap-up by explaining, "Skydiving is a seductive **sport**, where **those who are** the greatest **danger** are **the experienced jumpers** who, **like test** pilots, **keep** pushing **the** envelope to the outer **limits.**"

"Great story," chirps Hugh Downs.

"**I think they are** crazy," adds Barbara Walters.