KEY SAFETY POINTS ABOUT AAD USE

Written on Behalf of the CSPA Technical & Safety Committee
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Always refer to the manufacturer's manual as the definitive source for operating, calibrating, and maintaining your AAD. While briefings and posters help reinforce good habits, the manual contains the precise, model-specific instructions that must guide every jumper's setup and decision-making.

Automatic Activation Devices (AADs) have become a cornerstone of modern skydiving safety, but their value depends on how well jumpers understand their purpose and limitations. While these devices have saved countless lives, they are not magic solutions. They are tools — powerful ones — that work best when paired with strong fundamentals, disciplined altitude awareness, and consistent equipment care.

AADs Are a Backup, not a Primary Safety System

An AAD is designed to intervene only when everything else has gone wrong. It is a last-resort mechanism, not a substitute for proper altitude management or emergency procedures. Skydivers must still deploy their main canopy at the correct altitude and be ready to execute emergency procedures immediately if something goes wrong. Relying on an AAD instead of solid habits is a dangerous mindset.

Proper Setup and Pre-Jump Checks Are Essential

An AAD only works as intended when it is turned on, calibrated correctly, and set for the environment in which you're jumping. Turning the device on at the wrong elevation or entering incorrect offsets can lead to dangerous mis-activations. Most units automatically shut off after approximately 14 hours after initial startup — and if a long day of jumping extends beyond that window, the device can switch off even during a skydive. If you travel or move to a significantly different elevation, you must turn the unit off and on again to allow it to recalibrate. Many units have multiple setting modes that affect its trigger point, the jumper must verify the correct mode prior to every jump.

Environmental and Situational Factors Affect Performance

AADs interpret altitude and descent rate based on pressure changes, which means environmental conditions matter. Temperature, humidity, and air density can all influence readings. Body position also plays a role.

Undesired Activations Can Be Dangerous

While AADs are designed to save lives, an unintended activation can create serious hazards. Premature reserve deployment may lead to entanglement with other jumpers, canopy collisions, two-canopy-out situations, or reserve deployment at unsafe speeds. These scenarios highlight why proper setup and awareness are so important.

AADs Must Be Maintained and Serviced

Like any piece of life-saving equipment, AADs require regular care. Jumpers must follow the manufacturer's service schedule, including battery replacements, cutter changes, and periodic inspections. After any activation — intentional or not — the rig must be inspected by a certified rigger, and any damaged components must be replaced before the system is used again.

AAD Activations Indicate a Serious Safety Breakdown

Any AAD activation should be treated as a major incident. It signals that something went significantly wrong in the skydive. Proper follow-up includes reporting the incident, having the equipment inspected, reviewing contributing factors, and pursuing coaching or retraining as needed. These steps help prevent repeat occurrences and strengthen safety culture across the community.

In Canada, AAD use is deeply integrated into national safety expectations. AADs are required (CSPA BSR 2.9) for students, CSPA Solo Certified holders, and tandems, and they are strongly recommended for all licensed jumpers. The CSPA also strongly recommends the use of AADs when acting in the role of an instructor or coach, reinforcing the expectation that leader's model best practices. Widespread AAD use supports CSPA's broader commitment to a consistent, proactive safety culture and contributes directly to national incident-prevention goals.

CSPA Resources: AAD Safety Poster

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⚠️ AADS ARE A BACKUP – NOT A PLAN

An AAD is a last-resort device. It does NOT replace:

- Altitude awareness
- Timely main deployment
- Immediate emergency procedures

Important reminders:

- Relying on your AAD instead of solid habits is a dangerous mindset.
- AADs require care and maintenance.
- Include your AAD in every gear check.
- AADs SAVE LIVES!

✅ PROPER SETUP & PRE-JUMP CHECKS ARE ESSENTIAL

An AAD only works correctly when:

- It is turned on
- It is properly calibrated
- It is set for the correct elevation

Important reminders:

- Know your shut-off window (~14 hrs for most units); the device can switch off even during a skydive
- Incorrect settings or offsets can cause mis-activations.

📘 KNOW YOUR MANUAL

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