

Why take the risk?

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I watched an interesting TV program a few years ago about people who do high-risk sports.

The term 'Adrenaline Junkie' is quite often used as some kind of badge of honour.

This one fellow on the show, who had already done things like base jumping, invented a new sport.

He would tie ropes around his ankles and leap off mountain cliffs. The thrill was the free fall. I'm not sure how he didn't manage to rip his legs off, but I believe the ropes were a special type that stretched, so it wasn't a sudden stop.

This man was from California and pretty much a typical surfer guy who said 'dude' a lot. He was, indeed, a rather likable, outgoing fellow.

His new sport had found quite a few followers.

A few weeks after the show aired, he was killed during a jump - he was around 30 years old.

His friend, who was with him when he made the jump, said they heard a scream followed by the sound of breaking branches as his body hurtled through a forest area and onto the ground below.

An investigation revealed the ropes he had used had been stored for a while and became brittle in spots and broke when he hit the end of the line.

This is why you always check your equipment.

The sport took a left turn after this incident, and I don't think anyone does it anymore.

I have never understood why some people engage in activities where the risk of severe injury or death is too obvious for people with common sense.

Many people engage in high-risk activities every day. If you go skiing, snowboarding, play contact hockey or football, ride a motorcycle, race a car, ride a snowmobile, or take that once-in-a-lifetime jump out of an airplane with a parachute, you've engaged in an activity with a higher-than-normal degree of risk.

There's nothing wrong with any of these activities. Skiing is a fun sport, but at the same time, everyone knows a fall or collision could get you hurt. The key is to be trained and do it as safely as you can.

After all, you can't stay home wrapped in bubble wrap all the time.

You may, however, wish you didn't try that black diamond run if you find yourself in the hospital with a painful broken leg - but that's life - got to have some fun!

However, when you try that activity where the risk outweighs the experience, you may have gone too far.

Every year, people sign up to climb Mount Everest. And every year, people die while attempting the climb.

What they don't really tell you is if you run into trouble, no one will help you. The mountain is littered with over 200 dead bodies of climbers, who were left where they died.

If you run into trouble because of the altitude or cold, no one will stop to help you ? they will step over you and keep going.

There is even one guy who died a few decades ago, nicknamed 'green boots' because of his attire, whose body lies frozen on the mountain and serves as a road sign for climbers.

'When you see green boots, make a right.'

Now the deep seas submersible, Titan, has been lost, along with five souls, while on an 'adventure' to see the remnants of the Titanic.

This adventure was super high risk. Not only were they going into the most inhospitable place on the planet, the craft they were passengers on was of questionable construction.

The Titan operated in international waters, so it wasn't subject to any country's laws or safety regulations. The guy who built this disaster of a marine vessel said he didn't want to be 'bogged down' by such standards.

The vessel was largely constructed of carbon fibre. Engineers already warned that when subject to different levels of extreme pressure, the hull would experience fatigue. Pressure at the dive site is 400 times greater than sea level.

This is the same reason why pressurized aircraft only operate for so long before being retired.

During a recent interview about the Titan, the company CEO showed the video game controller that is used to steer the vehicle. The interviewer was shocked at seeing what was basically a kid's toy being in control of a deep sea craft.

The interviewer inspected the Titan and noticed some rather slipshod methods used in its operation.

When he questioned the CEO, saying that parts of the craft appear to be jury-rigged, the CEO laughed it off.

The risk involved in seeing a beat-up old shipwreck certainly was not worth the experience, especially since none of those on board lived to tell about the experience.