

IIT Professor joins 99 others to break skydiving record

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IIT has many claims to fame, and it just added a new claim to its laundry list of achievements. On September 22 IIT's Professor John Kallend joined 99 other skydivers in setting a new world record by performing a formation wingsuit dive from 13,000 feet. The divers jumped from five different airplanes to form a diamond formation as they fell.

This isn't the first time Kallend has been involved in a record-setting skydive. Kallend was a member of the team who set the previous wingsuit formation dive record, and as a member of that team, he was contacted to take part in this new attempt to break the record.

A key part of this world record was the fact that all of the skydivers wore wingsuits for their jump. A wingsuit is a special type of skydiving suit that has fabric between the legs and between both arms and the torso. This fabric is specially installed so that air is trapped in it, pressurizing the sections. This turns the suit into a simple airfoil, allowing the wearer of the wingsuit to travel horizontally while skydiving, something typical skydivers are not able to do. The design of the wingsuit makes it "like wearing a straightjacket," said Kallend, making a wingsuit jump much more complex than a typical jump. Due to this fact, a lot of experience is needed in order to use a wingsuit. A skydiver must have completed at least

200 skydives before they will be allowed to make wingsuit jumps. Throughout this past summer, tryouts were held internationally to assemble the crew for this record attempt. The crew represents the best and most experienced wingsuit divers in the world. Kallend himself has completed over 600 wingsuit dives before becoming a part of this team.

The record attempt was made in Peris Valley in Southern California. This location was chosen from a shortlist of 10 dropzones, which were the only ones in the country who could handle a group of this size. When the team assembled the weekend of the record attempt, large amounts of practice went into each jump. "We practiced 15 minutes on the ground for every minute in the air," said Kallend, "we would walk out the sequence of building the formation in the air and breaking off the formation so we could deploy parachutes."

Forming the record-breaking 100-man diamond was very difficult, and despite the massive amounts of experience the team had and the large amounts of practice performed, the formation was not successfully achieved on the first try. The crew was not successful until their 10th try over the weekend. Until the jump was successful, "we would jump every two hours," said Kallend. After an unsuccessful jump, team members would use those two hours to repack their parachutes, debrief, and rehydrate before going back up.

The successful jump was quite a sight to behold and experience. Divers



jumped from a height of 14,500 feet above sea level. Because of their wingsuits, it is estimated that they traveled two miles horizontally while in freefall. Kallend estimates that while in freefall, each skydiver was travelling 18 miles per hour forward and 55 miles per hour downward. The divers would freefall for two minutes and 15 seconds before

deploying their parachutes at 2,500 feet.

With the world record set, the only thing left to do is break it once again. The last wing suit formation record was set three years ago, and Kallend imagines that that would be approximately how long it will be before another attempt is made to break the record that was set weeks ago.

