

萬無一失

wan4 wu2 yi4 shi1

Cycling is a reasonably safe sport if you do it on proper cycling routes and wear protective gear. But many people just don't like wearing a helmet because it would mess up their hair.

Now Swedish engineers have invented a protective option that does not involve messing up hair -- an airbag that looks like a collar but will pop open to envelop the head and neck completely if the cyclist should fall off the bike.

It looks like the device could ensure that cyclists would be “萬無一失” (wan4 wu2 yi4 shi1) as far as safety is concerned.

“萬” (wan4) is “ten thousand,” “a great many,” “無” (wu2) “without,” “nil,” “—” (yi4) “one,” and “失” (shi1) “to lose,” “to fail,” “to miss,” “a mistake,” “a fault.” Literally, “萬無一失” (wan4 wu2 yi4 shi1) is “one thousand, not one miss,” “not even one failure in one thousand times.”

“萬無一失” (wan4 wu2 yi4 shi1) means “no danger of

Idiom by Lon Yan

anything going wrong,” “no risk at all,” “perfectly safe,” “surefire,” “not a chance of an error,” “guarantee complete success.”

A related term is “萬一” (wan4 yi4), meaning “just in case,” “a contingency,” “if by any remote chance.” Everyone who makes plans would want them to be “萬無一失” (wan4 wu2 yi4 shi1). But, in reality, it is impossible to completely eliminate the possibility of something going wrong, no matter how perfect a plan might seem.

So we need to have a Plan B, or a Plan C, “以防萬一” (yi3 fang2 wan4 yi1) – “to prepare for all contingencies,” “just to be safe.”

Terms containing the character “失” (shi1) include:

失敗 (shi1 bai4) – to fail; to lose

失望 (shi1 wang4) – to lose hope; disappointed

失眠 (shi1 mian2) – insomnia

失業 (shi1 ye4) – to be unemployed