

EM9511: The Globe and April 8, 1995, page D7

## Perils of peanut butter and other risks

Re Firemen Removed From 15 Airports (April 5):

It is certainly time that Canada took a serious look at how we manage risk. In 1995, few, if any, of us will burn to death on a Canadian airport runway, while more than 250 of us will die in a crash involving a tractor-trailer. Four children died in Ontario last year because they were run over by a farm tractor or a wagon being driven by their parents. Forty thousand of us will die this year from the long-term effects of tobacco smoke.

A recent study done jointly by researchers at Harvard and Stanford Universities determined that we have a one-in-a-million chance of death from many activities, including eating 40 tablespoons of peanut butter or travelling 1,000 kilometres in an airplane. Airplanes and airports are very safe, compared with other activities we take for granted – like driving on the 401 in Toronto.

It is time to take millions of dollars of fire-

fighting equipment out of Canadian airports where the risk of dying from fire is almost zero – so that we can either invest that money where we will save lives or stop borrowing that money on the world bond market. Dollars spent in air-sea rescue save hundreds of lives while the same dollars spent at airports save none.

We need to stop spending money where it does not make a difference to saving or protecting lives and spend it where we get a bang for the buck. This risk-management approach is needed in many areas of public spending – for example, to shift spending toward preventing cancer and away from treatments that do not change the probability of death. Cancer mortality is the same now as it was in the 1950s, and we are spending billions of dollars to stave off death rather than to support health.

As for the anxiety expressed by pilots and flight attendants, may I remind them that they are safer in an airplane than in a car. And

so are their passengers. Planes crash and burn rarely, and crashes almost never occur on the runway.

Crashes are newsworthy because people die in groups and not as individuals like they do in cars, in industrial accidents, or from smoking.

We cannot buy all things with our limited public funds. In past years regulators have established fat budgets and spent money without assessing the long-term impact – now the nation is at risk. My hope would be that every federal and provincial government would take heed of the Transport decision to spend smarter and spend less. Airports are just the beginning. Every Canadian life should be equally guarded against risk: on a farm, in a school, on a highway, in a logging camp, or for a cop on the beat.

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The article EM9511 reprinted above is used in Figure 7.15 of the STAT 220 Course Materials.