



Bonnie Voage ⚡ 3 days ago 4 min read

We're Going Down! Well, Not All of Us. The Truth Behind the Air-Scare

Updated: a few seconds ago



Every year we brave a 12hr drive across the country to see family and I used take pride in the the non-stop, exhausting endeavor. Not this year. Between tornadoes, RSV infections all around, unplanned hotels stays, and navigating out of state emergency rooms, I need a break. I just want to get us there and enjoy our time with family, but I watch the news and have to wonder, **is flying still safe?** The news says no, and what's funny is I still haven't heard about any specific crashes lately, have you? I can't help but wonder why that is. So, I reached out to my friend Holly Figueroa, a researcher with [Sunset Air](#), to get the facts of the matter. I think, like me, you'll be surprised at what the news has failed to share.

What the News Didn't Tell You

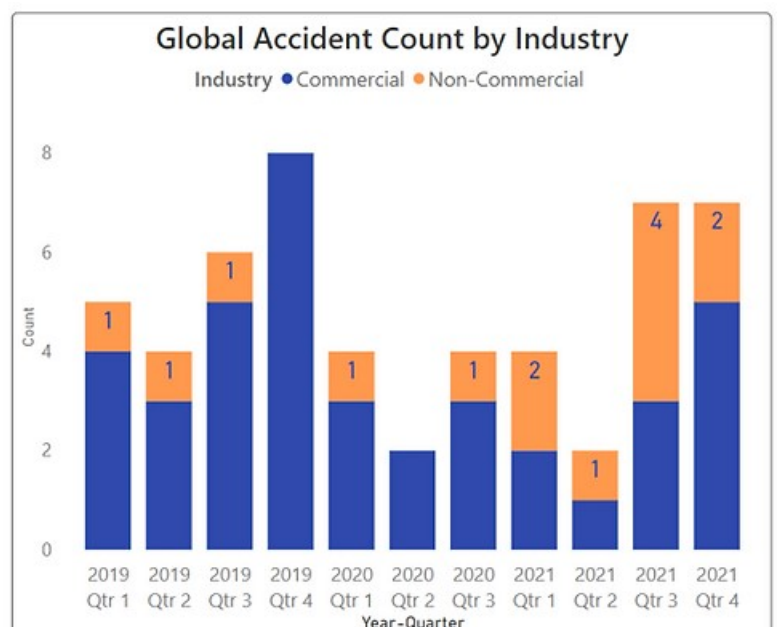
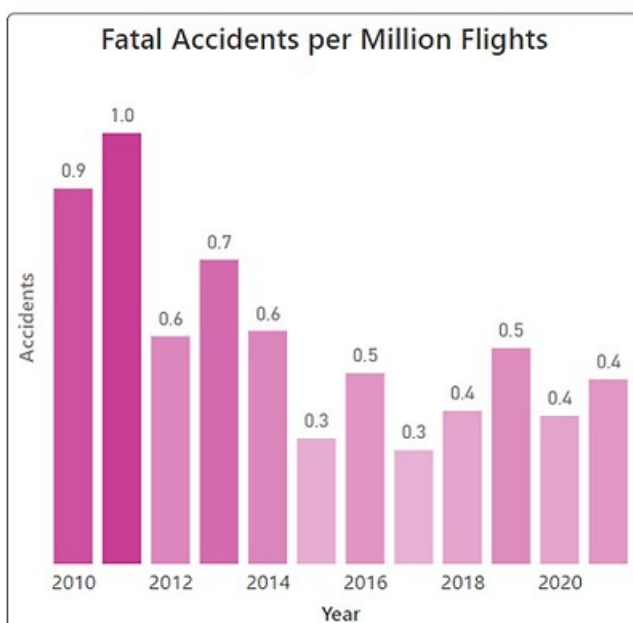
According to her, it's about failing to put numbers into perspective and when you do, **commercial air is "safer than it's ever been"**. I asked her to walk me through this, because that's totally the opposite of what I am hearing on the news. She started by comparing things to cars. "If I said that yearly road fatalities

increased by 4% since 2018, you probably wouldn't bat an eye. ..Even knowing that small percent meant a lot of people, we're used to it". She's right, I know driving is risky, it's never phased me a bit.

"When it comes to stats, the truth is a rise from 1 to 5 fatalities might not inspire panic, but calling it a 400% increase might if you needed a headline."

Something the media has left unsaid is **over 67 million airline passengers** flew in 2020 and all but five arrived safely. You heard right, there was **a total of 5 airline related fatalities in 2020**. Meanwhile, traveling by car continues to kill between 22,000 to 24,000 people every

year in the US. Holly explained, "When it comes to stats, the truth is a rise from 1 to 5 fatalities might not inspire panic, but calling it a 400% increase might if you needed a headline." Even globally, research shows fatal airline accidents are spectacularly rare. Okay, I'm thinking still, surely something triggered this news gossip. I asked if she's saying the entire issue is a lie, pulled from the sky - no pun intended. She admitted, "No, it's just not what you think."



The Truth

"It's private jets, charter flights, commuter carriers that are a concern right now. News Editors have lumped us together with them totally ignoring important differences." Her team noticed a **recent jump in non-commercial accidents** but these classes of flights don't have to play by the same rules and safety regulations as commercial airlines. Holly explained that the number of accidents are still low, like single-digits and don't look like much when you compare crash counts to commercial air, but the context changes everything. "Fact is, the numbers shouldn't be remotely comparable, there are 10x fewer of these flights compared to commercial air." I guess the real story is **commercial airlines are taking the fall for private-jetters** and the like. So before you decide to take your private jet or drive 12 hours with a toddler in the name of safety, do the safer thing - book a commercial flight. Holly would highly recommend Sunset Air, and she certainly knows what she's talking about.

SOURCES

National Safety Council

<https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/home-and-community/safety-topics/deaths-by-transportation-mode/>

File Name/Sheet: Deaths by Mode/Transportation Mode Comparison Table

Dashboard Visual: US Travel Fatalities, A Comparative View 2018-2020

Bureau of Transportation Statistics

<https://www.transtats.bts.gov/Data Elements Financial.aspx?Qn6n=K>

File Name/Sheet: yearly_crash_data, Net Income

Dashboard Visual: Airline Industry Net Profits 2018-2022

The World Bank: Data

https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IS.AIR.DPRT?most_recent_value_desc=true

File Name/Sheet: yearly_crash_data, 2020 Departures

Dashboard Visual: Air Travelers (Passengers) by Country

A 250-word paper summarizing what you did and why you made the decisions you did – why did you choose the visualizations you did? How did this information differ from previous internal campaigns? What were your overall findings? What ethical considerations came up when presenting to this audience or while you were doing your research?

DESIGN ESSAY

For my Blog Post project task I chose mostly bar charts as they are very readable for most people at a glance. I chose a smaller range of dates to not overwhelm the reader with unnecessary context - such as fatal accidents over time. The downward trend in reduced accidents is visually clear in 10-15yrs and less cluttered than when using 30 years. To emphasize the decrease in accidents over time, I also chose to use a gradient function in coloring the bars to get lighter as values decreased. It was important, in the context of my narrative to allow the reader to see that rates not only go down, but fluctuate as they do. In addition to the bar chart I also chose to include a categorical line chart to give readers a quick first impression of just how safe flying was compared to other modes of transportation. In creating them I chose to annotate only categories for air and cars since I do not discuss the other modes. I felt this would make it very clear to the reader how high fatalities were for cars in comparison. My Color scheme this time was focused around a sunset theme(pinks, yellows, oranges, deep purple) to match the name of my fictional airline. It also suiting the scenario where the person being interviewed for an airline, perhaps provided the visualizations. Unlike previous work, this blog does not suggest potential reasons for the media attack. I chose to pull in additional context around the facts, to build a case where the media is mishandling data that, if understood correctly, shows that airlines are safe while non-commercial air is having increased safety incidents.

