

Is Flying more fatal than driving

Despite the recent tragic loss activity, flying is often said to be the safest form of transport, and this is at least true in terms of fatalities per distance travelled. According to the Civil Aviation Authority, the fatality rate per billion kilometres travelled by plane is 0.003 compared to 0.27 by rail and 2.57 by car. In absolute numbers, driving is more dangerous, with more than 5 million accidents compared to 20 accidents in flying. A more direct comparison per 100 million miles pits driving's 1.27 fatalities and 80 injuries against flying's lack of deaths and almost no injuries, which again shows air travel to be safer.

Odds

The National Safety Council compiled an odds-of-dying table for 2008, which further illustrates the relative risks of flying and driving safety. It calculated the odds of dying in a motor vehicle accident to be 1 in 98 for a lifetime. For air and space transport (including air taxis and private flights), the odds were 1 in 7,178 for a lifetime, according to the table. Fatal accidents have fallen every decade since the 1950s, a significant achievement given the massive growth in air travel since then. In 1959, there were 40 fatal accidents per one million aircraft departures in the US. Within 10 years this had improved to less than two in every million departures, falling to around 0.1 per million today.

Conclusion

Statistically speaking, flying is far safer than driving. However, it may feel more dangerous because risk perception is based on more than facts, according to David Ropeik, risk communication instructor at Harvard School of Public Health. Driving affords more personal control, making it feel safer. In addition, plane crashes are catastrophic, killing more people at once, which grabs more attention and makes people more sensitive to them. Car crashes happen every day and spread the loss over time, making their combined effects less noticeable. The improvement in airline safety is down to a combination of several factors, although the introduction of the jet engine in the 1950s stands out as a major development. Jet engines provide a level of safety and reliability unmatched by the earlier piston engines. Today, it is said that engine manufacturers have almost eliminated the chance of engine failure.

The introduction of electronics, most notable the introduction of digital instruments – known as the 'glass cockpit' in the 1970s – and the advent of fly-by-wire technology in the 1980s are also notable achievements, driving safety improvements. Improvements in sensors, navigation equipment and air traffic control technology, such as anti-collision control systems, have also played a role.