



How Risky Is It, Really?: Why Our Fears Don't Always Match the Facts

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"Clear, balanced, and lively." -- Steven Pinker, bestselling author of *How the Mind Works* **ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE "RIGHT" RISKS?**

Do you worry more about radiation from nuclear power or from the sun?

Are you more afraid of getting cancer than heart disease?

Are you safer talking on your cell phone or using a hands-free device when you drive?

Do you think global warming is a serious threat to your health?

GET THE FACTS BEHIND YOUR FEARS--AND DISCOVER . . . HOW RISKY IS IT, REALLY?

International risk expert David Ropeik takes an in-depth look at our perceptions of risk and explains the hidden factors that make us unnecessarily afraid of relatively small threats and not afraid enough of some really big ones. This read is a comprehensive, accessible, and entertaining mixture of what's been discovered about how and why we fear--too much or too little. It brings into focus the danger of The Perception Gap: when our fears don't match the facts, and we make choices that create additional risks.

This book will not decide for you what is really risky and what isn't. That's up to you. *HOW RISKY IS IT, REALLY?* will tell you how you make those decisions. Understanding how we perceive risk is the first step toward making wiser and healthier choices for ourselves as individuals and for society as a whole.

TEST YOUR OWN "RISK RESPONSE" IN DOZENS OF SELF-QUIZZES!

How Risky Is It, Really?: Why Our Fears Don't Always Match the Facts Details

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From Reader Review How Risky Is It, Really?: Why Our Fears Don't Always Match the Facts for online ebook

James says

I bought this book for a contract involving risk management, and wound up rather enjoying its conversational explanation of what risk is and how we experience it.

I particularly like knowing that we freakout before we think. Ropeik ran through the physiology and chemistry of fear and it was riveting. We humans are programmed to freak out unless we do some big work to overcome it.

So yes, most things may not be as risky as we think. Fun read if you're into this sort of thing.

Paul says

In the three months following the September 11 attacks, automobile fatalities rose by 11-34% (depending on which study you believe). Even though air travel, even on September 12, was/is statically safer than driving. But fear almost always wins out over facts, alas.

Some excellent information, but repetitive and over-long.

Erik Dewey says

A fascinating read on how we measure risk both from a physiological and psychological view point. I really enjoyed reading about the actual biochemical reactions that were going on inside my brain when I suddenly need to determine the risk of things around me. Along the way there are little quizzes you take before a new concept is introduced so you have a data personal to you to see how you fare.

One thing I found was that the chapters were abnormally long. I think there were only five or six chapters in the whole book. It meant that the concept of the chapter dragged on for quite a while so that when I reached the end of the chapter I needed to go back to the beginning to remind myself the other concepts I had read a few days before. The writing is lively and interesting, it just has a lot of information to digest on a topic.

A good book that I enjoyed. I do now wonder if I will be able to override some of my physiological impulses so that I can apply the knowledge that I've learned from this book. Only experience will tell.

Jaylia3 says

React fast, think later. According to the scientific research Ropeik cites in this useful book, human brains are designed to respond quickly to perceived danger, before there's time to rationally consider what the real risks of the situation are. What served us well in the age of the saber tooth tiger is not as useful for making

informed decisions in the modern world, plus all those fight, flight or freeze chemicals streaming through our nervous system create their own health risk. The heart of this book for me is the second and third chapters which describe the natural biases, mental shortcuts and risk factors that can lead to making counterproductive--even deadly--choices in an effort to avoid danger, choices like driving after 9/11 because it felt safer than flying though it instead caused a spike in highway fatalities.

I read much of this same material in Daniel Gardner's book *The Science of Fear*. The difference between the two books is that *How Risky is It, Really* is designed to be a personal guide for evaluating decisions. For that it is very effective, but by its later chapters the material has gotten repetitive. *The Science of Fear* is not as easily used as a daily guide but its scope is broader and deeper and it concerns itself more with implications for the future and for society as a whole.

Les says

This is an excellent explanation of the mechanics our brains use to do risk assessment. In addition, the author identifies how people unknowingly rely on their personal opinions and experiences instead of objective information when assessing the existence or impact of a risk, especially in the long term.

Elizabeth says

As heard on Point of Inquiry.

Sherry Leffert says

This book has something interesting to say but after having said it, repeats itself over and over. The point is that what we perceive as dangerous is often shaped by the media, by political point of view and by other factors and does not necessarily match the facts. This point is very worthwhile to understand but after that it is all repetition.

Joe Ciola says

The Grave Risk of Rationality Alone

To bring the "feelings" associated with risk to the conscious level is a giant step toward demystifying and dealing with rationality, feelings and risk. Acknowledging this reality is fundamental to healthy functioning individually and collectively.

Robert says

Weak. If there was one word to sum up the argument and delivery of the author's position, it would be "weak." The book was plagued by bad examples. Ropeik would present an idea, like "the Endowment Affect," explain it, say that people exhibit it, and then give an example. It all would seem to make sense and be convincing, but even with a little critical thought these sections fell apart, and the main unraveling came from his examples. The argument for a bounded rationality, risk mis-perception view of humans has potential merit, but David Ropeik was, at best, a flawed messenger.

Tracy says

A good, basic introduction to the neurology and psychology of risk perception. It discusses risk perception in both individuals and society at large, and includes tips for both individuals and societies on how to understand our innate responses to fear, and how to incorporate that understanding into our discussions of, reactions to, and policies about risk.

E says

getAbstract Book Review: How Risky Is It, Really?

This lively, honest book is a pleasure to read and easy to digest. Journalist David Ropeik demystifies the common mental and social mechanisms humans use to evaluate danger. He explains how people often misrepresent and misunderstand possibly perilous circumstances and tells you how to weigh potential risk more accurately. Some explanations are too long and some "risk perception factors" are a bit similar, but, that noted, Ropeik's many insights are so instantly applicable that any reader will find them useful. getAbstract recommends his book to anyone involved in risk management and social policy, and to all consumers of the news.

Read more about this book in the online summary:
<http://www.getabstract.com/summary/13...>

Todd Martin says

In *How Risky Is It, Really?* David Ropeik discusses why people perceive certain activities as risky and others less so. Fortunately, Ropeik has a keen eye for the obvious and lists such contributing factors as:

- our familiarity with the risk
- our control over the risk
- whether we trust the individuals/organizations involved in the risk
- cultural factors
- how the media communicates risk

My biggest irritation with the book is that it contains nothing that any reasonable person couldn't have come up with on their own had they sat down and thought about it for an hour. Next on the list, is that once a subject is introduced, Ropeik then goes on to repeat himself 4-5 times to drive his unremarkable point home.

The real risk of *How Risky Is It, Really?* is one of being bored to death.

Ietrio says

The goal of this book is noble: counter balance the alarmist news. But the guy seems to be a journalist backed up only by a shallow read of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

Nicole says

This was a very interesting book! I found myself talking to my husband and family about it, and questioning my own beliefs about risk.

Nick Lo says

I persevered as much as I could but ultimately couldn't finish this book. For that reason I'd probably have given it 1 star if the subject itself wasn't interesting.

As mentioned by other reviewers here, there is a noticeable amount of repetition, but that bothered me less than the feeling that the conversation tended to ramble a lot of the time. The book really needed to be better organised and by that I mean with more than just headings and titles. After about the first third, it just starts to add layer upon layer of interaction of fear factors to the point where you end up thinking, wait, what you're really saying is "it's complicated". You then hope this is going to be broken down a bit but it diverges onto topics like the issue of the media pushing certain bias, but then that's counterbalanced with the point that it's not the fault of the media as they're a business, etc.

Too often I felt the references were overly simplified to make a point but in doing so ignored the nuances that would have influenced people's opinions beyond just the fear factor. An example is the suggestion that it is an irrational fear of nuclear power that influences people's objection to it. That is no doubt true, but it's surely difficult to isolate that from other variables that would influence perception such as, political, environmental, weaponry, etc?

The book isn't without value but I'd probably only recommend reading the first third or so. Even that may just confirm things that you already know such as; people are more loss averse than risk averse, echoing sayings like "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush".
