

## One Hundred Reasons Why We Should Replace the “Value of a Statistical Life” (VSL) with “Willingness to Pay for a Microrisk Reduction”

[Note: It’s easy. Just divide by one million.]

Trudy Ann Cameron

[*Vizzini has just cut the rope that The Dread Pirate Roberts has been climbing.*]

Vizzini: He didn’t fall? INCONCEIVABLE!

Inigo Montoya: You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.  
- The Princess Bride (1987)

The compendium below contains numerous samples of the mischief created by economists’ insistence on packaging and labeling estimates of the public’s willingness to pay for mortality risk reductions as “The Value of a Statistical Life.” I culled these quotes, from the indicated sources, during the days after the publication of the July 10, 2008 Associated Press story by Seth Borenstein entitled “An American life worth less today.”

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“Boxer Statement on EPA Decision to Lower Value of Human Life”

“Senator Boxer said: “The EPA’s decision to reduce the value of a human life when they consider the benefits of new environmental regulations is outrageous and must be reversed.”

“EPA may not think Americans are worth all that much, but the rest of us believe the value of an American life to our families, our communities, our workplaces and our nation is no less than it has ever been. This new math has got to go.”

“If these reports are confirmed, I will be introducing legislation to reverse this unconscionable decision at the earliest opportunity.”

- attributed to Sen. Barbara Boxer’s office, published July 11, 2008

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“Cosmic Markdown: EPA Says Life Is Worth Less”

By David A. Fahrenthold, Washington Post Staff Writer, Saturday, July 19, 2008; A01

Someplace else, people might tell you that human life is priceless. In Washington, the federal government has appraised it like a ‘96 Camaro with bad brakes...

...the Washington bureaucracy takes on a question usually left to preachers and poets.

...for the first time, the EPA has used this little-known process to devalue life...

... “By reducing the value of human life, which is really a devious way of cooking the books...”

...To grasp the mind-bending concept of a Blue Book value on life, government officials say it is important to remember that they are not thinking about anyone specific. ...

...an unlikely academic field has grown up to extrapolate life’s value from the everyday decisions of average Americans.

...Lowering the value of life. In some bureaucratic corners of Washington, it is the kind of phrase that nobody blinks at anymore.

...

Daniel Zemel, rabbi at Temple Micah on Wisconsin Avenue NW, said ...he could understand officials' logic for making decisions this way. But he said he would counsel anybody whose job involved "Statistical Lives" to think about what they really represent. "Numbers on a piece of paper are, at the end of the day, somewhere out there," Zemel said, "real people whose lives are being impacted."

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My eyes weren't quite working when I first read the title of this post; I saw "EPA To America: Your Life Is Worthless." Sadly, my only thought was "well, yeah, sounds about right from them."

- comment on New Republic website

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...Typical of all of the democrats on this site...you let government determine what your life is worth.

- comment on Newsvine #7.1 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 10:20 PM EDT

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This is one more example of the government trying to put one over on the public. It is impossible that the EPA could have been unaware of the consequences of the reassessment. They believed that nobody would notice it. This administration has stooped to duplicity so often that it is business as usual for them. Once again lives are valued below profits. Washington now serves K Street, not the public.

- comment on Newsvine #8 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 8:26 PM EDT

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Life is worth far more than any study can put a value on it. Who cares what the EPA thinks! We are endowed by our creator with life. I wish the government would spend more time thinking about how to serve the people and less about what we are worth or how they can raise our taxes! We are Americans and there is a reason so many people want in this country. It is because we are worth a lot.

- comment on Newsvine #9 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 8:37 PM EDT

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...I think people are just trying to make sense of this EPA decision, when, in reality it should not be looked at as a human devaluation--it's simply a political ploy (call it a conspiracy theory if you will--it's my viewpoint based on what this admin has done in the past) that will allow this administration--or any other--to continue to condone crapping up our environment in the name of the almighty buck. Sad thing is, the government has most of us so lethargic and apathetic to really give a rip, as long as we can still get to Wal-Mart to buy our Chinese-made junk and sit around watching garbage on television . . . we're all becoming idiots to allow this to happen.

- comment on Newsvine #10.2 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 11:52 PM EDT

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You know, I can not help but notice the fact that this is all about a life, and it being worth a certain amount....What ever happened to life being priceless? Something you can't just say one person's life is more important then anothers? A child who'd life is not so grand, and an adult that is the head of a large rich company; when compared to who you would try to save first, I would save the child, and most I know would do the same. It does not matter if that child will grow to make a lot of money for this country or not. I'm pretty sure firefighters and other rescuers do not stop to think if the person's life is worth the effort, risk, and money invovled in the equipment. By putting a price on a life, comparing it to somthing like world polution, then saying the money and effort is not worth those people's lives that are effected, is to me, inhumane, ignorant, self-centered, blind and f'ing retarded.

- comment on Newsvine #16 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 9:28 PM EDT

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I can't believe that there is even a study that tries to put a value to human life....

- comment on Newsvine #25 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 10:53 PM EDT

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You really want for interesting reading then you do the math, how much is the EPA worth collectively speaking? I got along for nearly half century without them, I think I can do without them for ever.

- comment on Newsvine #26 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 11:00 PM EDT

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All this study proves is this quote: There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics. Benjamin Disraeli (1804 - 1881). Statistics can show pretty much anything. When you are working in such a abstract as putting a value on a person's life, something that could never be proven, statistics usually just fulfill the political views of the statistician or whomever paid for the study. ...

- comment on NewsVine #27 - Thu Jul 10, 2008 11:13 PM EDT

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The ultimate capitalist perversion. Putting a monetary value on a human life. We have truly crossed over into hell on earth when we can seriously discuss how much money a life is worth. ...

- comment on NewsVine #29 - Fri Jul 11, 2008 12:10 AM EDT

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...Citizens create the GDP and tax base for governments. Shouldn't our worth be the potential contribution to that figure and not 'what we would pay to stay safe'?

- comment on NewsVine #31 - Fri Jul 11, 2008 12:36 AM EDT

First of all no one and no government organization can decide what a life is truly worth. That is how the article is [written], but the way the study is being conducted it seems they are saying less government regulation because of the lower value. ...

- comment on NewsVine #33 - Fri Jul 11, 2008 1:01 AM EDT

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I find it ludicrous that the government is even in this business. The answer is to eliminate the EPA and all other such non-Constitutionally mandated agencies. Then there will be no cost associated with regulations.

- comment on NewsVine #35 - Fri Jul 11, 2008 10:06 AM EDT

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Another proof that the Bush Administration has no respect for human life or moral value. Shame on Bush and his cronies

- comment on NewsVine #40 - Fri Jul 11, 2008 6:42 PM EDT

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What is the value of a vote?

- comment on NewsVine #41 - Sat Jul 12, 2008 11:18 AM EDT

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Government: Human 'life' literally worth less than five years ago – headline at pantagraph.com  
No surprise there, we have been killing 4000 per day for years. There is no value on human life in this country. Abortion is the leading cause of death in America.

- comment on pantagraph.com

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Not only are our lives devalued, but our rights, our privacy, our immunity from the abuses of power have been diminished as well. Like those huge flocks of turkeys that accumulate in October, we're here to be used.

- blogged at Impolitic.com

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I'm worth \$6.9 million? Any chance I can cash out my statistical life worth right now? I'd be happy to sign a waiver to have the federal gov't add me to their "Do Not Worry About" list.

- comment at Think Progress July 11th, 2008 at 12:34 pm

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Just saying . . .are we surprised? as far as cheney/bush and their enablers are concerned, our troops are expendable.  $4100 \times \$6,900,000 = \$28.3$  billion. So?

- comment at Think Progress July 11th, 2008 at 12:59 pm

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but...but...but...

...I thought nothing was more valuable than a human life. Maybe they only meant Teri Schiavo.

- comment at Think Progress July 11th, 2008 at 1:01 pm

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If the statistical people had done the research and read the fine print then perhaps their lives would be worth more today, I have no sympathy.../snark  
- comment at Think Progress July 11th, 2008 at 1:02 pm

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EPA says the value of an American life has decreased. Just another “success” in the whole litany of accomplishments by the worst president in US history.....  
- comment at Think Progress July 11th, 2008 at 1:16 pm

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I feel so.....worthless.  
- comment at Think Progress, July 11th, 2008 at 1:31 pm

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This is good information to know. Next time I try and sell Americans, I’ll be sure to do it in Euros.  
- comment at Think Progress, July 11th, 2008 at 1:53 pm

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I was taught, and I will always believe that a price cannot be fixed to a human life!  
- comment at Think Progress, July 11th, 2008 at 2:04 pm

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American “life” is worth \$7 an hour. Unless you’re lucky and get to work at starbucks or walmart, then it’s eight. Corporations have won.  
- comment at Huffington Post

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Bush: ‘Human life is precious’—EPA: ‘Less than you might think’  
By David Walsh  
23 July 2008

A human life is infinitely precious, according to the Bush administration—unless, it turns out, keeping an individual alive might cut into corporate profits.

...The “value of a statistical life” refers to the supposed value to society of saving a ‘generic’ life.

...The “benefits” under discussion here are the survival of a given number of human beings; the “costs” are reduced company earnings.

...The notion that a cost can be placed on the value of preserving a human life is repugnant from the outset, although appropriate to a system in which every human attribute and activity is reduced to quantitative, dollars-and-cents terms.

...These arguments are specious. Everyday life entails certain risks, which can never be reduced to zero. However, no “consumer” willingly “prefers” the possibility of being made ill by a negligent company. This is a social crime, imposed on the population, which can be entirely eliminated by the proper measures.

- report at the World Socialist Website

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...Of course, depending on who you are, the US government may be placing a different value on your life. As the Houston Chronicle reports, the US Secret Service has budgeted \$110 million this year to provide protection to presidential candidates. By contrast, in Iraq, families of those accidentally killed by US troops in combat sometimes receive a condolence payment. That figure is capped at \$2,500.

... - Christian Science Monitor – bright green blog, by Eoin O’Carroll 7/14/08

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I don’t care what number a politician attaches to it, a human life is priceless. End of discussion.

– Comment, ABC News website

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This is the kind of inhuman “cost/benefit” calculation the the Nazi bureaucracy used to do when trying to figure out whether to keep their slave labourers (Jews and Russian POW’s) alive. The President of the United States should immediately FIRE ANYONE associated with this monstrous calculus. The fact that Bush won’t (and neither would a Democrat) tells you how your elite rulers really view you.

– comment on story at ASJ.com

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I usually vote Republican, and I admit I voted for Bush. There is nothing to believe here other than that this was done so that tougher environmental rules would not have to be enforced - or put into place to begin with. I really don’t believe my party will exist much longer, if it behaves this way. It does NOTHING for the environment (and now it’s essentially tossing human lives away!)....

– comment on story at ASJ.com

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And by the way -- and this has nothing to do w/ any side politically --- I have to say that this whole formula, anyhow, is DISGUSTING!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! This whole idea of a cost per life, w/ life-making decisions being made on a cost, makes me sick!

– comment on story at ASJ.com

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we know it is a political motivation to screw americans....so now, what can we do about it????

– comment on story at ASJ.com

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It's not just your 401(k) and the greenbacks in your wallet that aren't worth as much as they once were. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), your life is also worth less than it used to be—almost a million dollars less. ....Still, this isn't the first time the Bush administration and the EPA have tripped over their calculators and ended up in a political controversy when playing around with the value of human lives. In 2002, the EPA concluded that the lives of people over 70 were 38 percent less valuable than the lives of younger people—a decision which caused a public and political firestorm that led the agency to reverse its ruling.  
– Larry West, About.com Guide to Environmental Issues since 2005

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Saturday, July 12, 2008  
EPA Recalculates Dollar Value of Human Life  
- African American Environmentalist Association

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EPA: Value of an American's life dropping – AJC.com

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...My life is mine, God gave it to me and it is my right and responsibility to live it. No part of it \*whatsoever\* belongs to the government or anyone else, and for the government to dare to assign a monetary value to an individual's life is way out of line. ...  
– comment, CBS News website

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... You got to wonder, between the media and the government, is there ever any good news? I think these people get off on reporting bad, depressing news. Why don't they try to find something else to report instead of this rubbish they come up with? ...  
– comment, CBS News website

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So the government is finally making it official? We already knew that the NeoRepublicans did not value the average American for more than throw-away labor at Oil Companies and Dennys.  
– comment, CBS News website

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Veterans mistreated by the V.A. or the Pentagon would be astonished to learn that they are worth that MUCH!  
– comment, CBS News website

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The value of the EPA... Zero  
– comment, CBS News website

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There is no price (money) high enough to purchase my life, however I will gladly 'give' it up to save someone else if the need arose. You cannot truly put a value on life, Book keepers can manipulate the math to seemingly evaluate a Citizens worth but this is an imperfect method. In the end, a life is worth no more and no less than the owner says it is.

– comment, CBS News website

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See Republicans, your value has been greatly diminished by the Bush Cartel. Add value to your worthless lives, Vote Democrat.

– comment, CBS News website

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What a completely disconnected way to evaluate the costs to do the right thing. What ever happened to doing the right thing regardless of cost? Many have fought and died for our freedom and many of us have lost a loved one for those causes. Why in the world would we generate a cost process based on disconnected self worth assessments? ...

– comment, CBS News website

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“ but a life isn't worth NEARLY \$6.9M. That's crazy. And if you live in the 3rd world, you'd be lucky to get a few hundred dollars if your loved one died in an accident. “

– comment, CBS News website

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The \$6.9 million is not how much insurance you'll be paid, or receive if someone dies. It's the amount of money the Government is willing to spend for safety, per life. It's less in a poorer country because they won't/can't spend that amount per person for safety. If spending less than \$6.9 million on a smokestack filter so one person won't get lung cancer, they'll do it. If you need to spend \$7 million for it, they won't. Bolivia won't spend \$6.9 million dollars for a filter to save just one life. Because their economy is weaker, the number is much lower. The story says the US Government lowered that figure, because you're not worth it. The economy is bad. The money has been spent on Blackwater, KBR and others. It doesn't just mean you can't buy that car this year, it means more folks will die as the Government tells the industries they represent they can spend less (on mad cow detection, salmonella prevention, airline inspections, etc.)

Got it?

– comment, CBS News website

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“Life Not Worth As Much, Says Gov't Agency” WELL DUH! BRILLIANT! YAH THINK? Of course unless you're a government employee)

– comment, CBS News website

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Every death is a tragedy. A Million deaths is a Statistic. –Stalin

– comment, CBS News website

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I'm saying there are reasonable numbers somewhere between \$500.00 and \$7M that make more sense. ... The difference between what we in the West say a life is worth and the 2nd-3rd world says is staggering. Why not decide it's worth, say \$250,000 for starters? That amount is also more similar to what a life insurance policy is. I for one don't know ANYONE who has a \$7M life insurance policy.

– comment, CBS News website

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So if I can raise \$6.9 million will they sell me Bush or Cheney, delivered to my cellar?

– comment, CBS News website

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The number is lower because they included Liberals and Progressives in the report statistics this time around.

– comment, CBS News website

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Great!, now corporate america can kill off more americans than ever and not worry about lawsuits from dumping chemicals in rivers, streams, backyards, and making unsafe products. yahhhyyyyyy!!

– comment, CBS News website

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Years ago, I had heard that the older formula's estimated life value was something the airlines, auto industries and even pharmaceutical companies used in designing safety features and that until enough people died from a failure, making it more costly to pay out in litigation costs, the flaw wouldn't be remedied. This devalued human life amount makes it even more perplexing and cause for concern, since manufacturers will marginalize the safety design factor merely to reduce their costs and take a risk and gamble on human loss of life were there such catastrophic failures with their products or structures.

– comment, CBS News website

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Thank you GOP for you greed now I see how you can reduce taxes. Enough is enough!

– comment, CBS News website

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When asked about loss of life in Iraq what was Worthless Cheney's response...SO! Iraqi citizens must have a ZERO net worth to Bush/Cheney/McSame. After the world court gets hold of this Administrations Minions I wouldn't value them individually worth a [Plugged Nickel].

– comment, CBS News website

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Pure Coffee Shop Marxist twaddle.

– comment, CBS News website

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EPA Says Americans Worth \$900,000 Less Than They Were 5 Years Ago - - - - YEAH? The fruggin EPA is WORTHLESS, and they should have been abolished YEARS ago! Thanks, Preznut Nixon, for giving such a wonderful, worthless, federal krapp whole agency!  
– comment, CBS News website

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In theory, If someone (not me) were to gun down ALL the pols who make these life and death decisions based on cost and the dollar value of the lives lost. Would the value of my life go up or down? I'd be alive and they'd be dead though Correct? Still sounds like a better plan.... If one's life or loved one's life was destroyed by some penny pinching plan of government, is revenge ever justified? Would that be up to a jury?  
– comment, CBS News website

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Let's not forget Lee Iacocca's Pinto equation: The cost to fix vs. the cost to pay lawsuits. It was cheaper to pay the lawsuits for the dead.  
– comment, CBS News website

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Life isn't measured by the amount of money one does or does not have. This article is absurd. Money is materialistic. You can't take it with you to the grave....  
– comment, CBS News website

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Well the EPA doesn't care about human life, obviously the Bush/McCain administration are "not" pro-life! ....  
– comment, CBS News website

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That price is for civilians, the military has to invest in training too, another 500K to 1 Mil. The math still works out though...  
– comment, CBS News website

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Let's see, at 6.9 mill per head, our manpower losses in Iraq come to just under \$30 billion. ... The troops are just a number on a tally sheet to this administration, cannon fodder with a firm price tag.  
– comment, CBS News website

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In theory, If someone (not me) were to gun down ALL the pols who make these life and death decisions based on cost and the dollar value of the lives lost. Would the value of my life go up or down? I'd be alive and they'd be dead though Correct? Still sounds like a better plan.... If one's

life or loved one's life was destroyed by some penny pinching plan of government, is revenge ever justified? Would that be up to a jury?

– comment, CBS News website

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What worthless bureaucrat is sitting somewhere making probably a six figure salary doing this kind of thing? These people are not needed if that's all they have to do all day. I think we should dump the whole bunch of them and start from scratch. I'm thinking all of them are worthless, with this poll as one of the most worthless. I wonder if God sits and looks down and calculates the value one of His creations. I wonder what Abraham Lincoln was thinking when he quoted that all men are created equal. To even have a list like this is the worst kind of bull\*\*\*\* that I have ever seen or heard of. I wonder what worth this person or persons that create this kind of poll puts on themselves?

– comment, CBS News website

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ABC reports Hatian KIDs are going for 150 bucks. These people are as sick as our Government.

– comment, CBS News website

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It's not only in America that the government puts a price tag on life, its just that we're the only country that has the highest price tag, other countries just dont care. I think all Americans need to go to another country and see just how good we have it. It can always be better, but its not up to our government, its up to us.

– comment, CBS News website

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Only in modern America could a human life have a monetary sum attached to it.

– comment, CBS News website

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Some people's lives are not even worth 2 cents.

– comment, CBS News website

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What a ridiculous article. It must be a slow news day.

– comment, CBS News website

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YOU Should Be Concerned... ..How much for the women? The little girl, how much? ...We want to buy your women! [with apologies to John Belushi]

- comment, CBS News website

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...AND NEXT YEAR...LIFE WON'T BE WORTH ANYTHING...and you'll have to pay to Gov't to stay alive... er...ahhh...wait, it allready works like that.

– comment, CBS News website

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I think 10 mil is more like it, then you simply can bank it, and live very well off the interest for the rest of your life. No need to take the gamble of investing with the criminals on Wall Street.

– comment, CBS News website

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Sounds like the citizens “Human Life Value” is being negatively affected by the 12 million illegals in the US who need to be shipped home at their own country’s expense. They are sucking up citizens tax dollars in welfare, healthcare and incarceration.

– comment, CBS News website

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“And they said, ‘It is the price of blood.’ “ – Bible

– comment, CBS News website

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“In America the value of your life is now simply determined by how much money you have. And no one even pretends it isn’t anymore. We have become simple, good old fashioned evil.”

– comment, CBS News website

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...The environment is fast eroding. Bush & business people know this. It will continue to do so. And become more evident to the public. They will demand action be taken to fix it. Bush’s time is almost up. He can only protect corporate polluters for six more months. SO---we’ve seen the actions Bush and Cheney have taken to protect polluters. Pressuring scientists to re-write reports, not make public statements, and not attend meetings; deleting parts of reports; failing to release information under FOIA, having agencies redefine the value of a human life (lower) as a rationale not to implement a regulation or law, GOP friendly judges have reversed or lessened damages against polluters, and my favorite, allowing business to write the law and submit it to Congress for passage. As they did with the oil industry. ...

– comment, CBS News website

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“‘And then, in all my passion and sacrifice, I found myself only a number to be counted and disposed of.’ SearingTruth, A Future of the Brave” ...

– comment, CBS News website

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The value of life is what your love ones, friends and associates think of you, not some statistic from the EPA. ...

– comment, CBS News website

...So what they are doing is coming out of the shadows of this fantasy illusionary fiat currency financial system into the open and saying to us “Yea...you are my chattle, you are my serfs and peasants and you are only worth what I say you are worth. ...”

– comment, CBS News website

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“EPA Says Americans Worth \$900,000 Less Than They Were 5 Years Ago” So this implies that because of Bush’s following of the Reagan “trickle down theory”, you are not worth the government serving you to the best of its ability. Now the EPA makes this official. ...

– comment, CBS News website

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“Other, similar calculations by the Bush administration have proved politically explosive. In 2002, the EPA decided the value of elderly people was 38 percent less than that of people under 70. After the move became public, the agency reversed itself”. This is truly sick...Who are these people and who them this right??? You know I was thinking earlier how it seems everyday there is some new unethical or criminal or devastating thing that happens in America everyday, but I was wrong today, the break down is happening hourly...I keep asking how can we take much more? We have a duty to uphold and we aren’t doing it...Our government as we know it is broken and we need to try something else. Where are the wise and humane leaders? Should we consider ourselves “on our own?” ...

– comment, CBS News website

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This is just one more glaring example of Republicons protecting the profits of corporations while they ignore public safety. ...

– comment, CBS News website

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“Statistical life”? any person with such an obsession with number does not deserve to serve the Public ...

– comment, CBS News website

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As population increases so will the value of life decrease. Get used to it people, we are on a down hill slide. Pro-lifers and religious anti-birth-control nuts must cease and desist. ...

– comment, CBS News website

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“It appears that they’re cooking the books in regards to the value of life,” said S. William Becker The administration has cooked the books on everything else, so why not the value of human life? The Bush administration is evil and corruption personified. May it and all concerned rot in hel\*.

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– comment, CBS News website

Congress should “cook” the books of these freaks and send them into the next disaster area to serve before the disaster hits. ...  
– comment, CBS News website

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Of course life is worth less after nearly eight years of Republican rule. Conservatives think that the little people only exist to be exploited and robbed. ...  
– comment, CBS News website

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Article: “According to the EPA, people shouldn’t think of the number as a price tag on a life.” Absolutely people shouldn’t. Its the price tag the GOVERNMENT puts on a life! Big difference!  
...  
– comment, CBS News website

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I think they are talking about the average american, which nowadays doesnt amount to much.... be more than average.  
– Comment, ABC News website

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I wonder what the government considers the value our military men and women’s lives. Or, for that matter, the lives the innocent killed in these wars that are fought to make the rich richer. Not much I would guess.  
– Comment, ABC News website

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...This administration has appointed political lap dogs to oversee federal regulatory agencies (EPA, OSHA, CPSC, etc.). These political lap dogs do the bidding of the industries they are meant to oversee. The industries, not the American public, are the “customers/clients” for these agencies now. In five years, the statistical worth of an American has gone down a million dollars?! This must be music to the ears of poisoning/polluting industries. Now they have a few more hundred human deaths to play with before they have to take action (and by take action, I don’t mean protect public/worker health and ensure public/worker safety, I mean launch PR campaigns to deny any harm, sue regulatory agencies in attempt to intimidate regulators, and use delaying tactics in courts so that most of the victims are dead before they have to pay a penny in damages.) To the Bush administration: A frozen embryo- priceless, An American worker- dime a dozen.  
– Comment, ABC News website

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What is the Value of a Human Life?

...The only way to do a direct comparison between an amount of money and a number of human lives is by giving each life a “value.”...

It's interesting to note that this calculation values all human life equally. The value of a hedge fund manager, a CEO of a huge corporation, or a humanitarian doctor curing children from diseases in depressed countries is no more and no less than the value of a bum on the street. A newborn baby with almost a century of possibilities is worth no more and no less than the 105-year-old on life support in the hospital, nearing his last breath.

If all life is worth the same amount, what is that dollar figure?...

A lower value placed on an individual's life for the purpose of statistics will result in fewer regulations passing. Additionally, the decreasing value of the dollar in comparison with the rest of the world currencies implies that human life is also decreasing value.

- By Flexo on Saturday, July 12, 2008 in Economy and Government at Consumerism Commentary

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The \$6.9 million is not a real figure. You cannot replace a person with this value of money or any other. So the calculation is arbitrary. The EPA can choose which studies it wants to include in its calculation. ...

So, how does one calculate the "statistical value of a (human) [just thought I'd throw the word human into that bureaucratic expression to provide a little perspective] life"?

It wouldn't work for researchers to survey Americans at gunpoint and ask how much they would pay not to die. Instead, an unlikely academic field has grown up to extrapolate life's value from the everyday decisions of average Americans.

Researchers try to figure out how much money it takes for people to accept slightly bigger risks, such as a more dangerous job. They also look at how much people will pay to make their daily risks smaller -- such as buying a bike helmet or a safer car.

"How much are you willing to pay for a small reduction . . . in the probability that you will die?" asked Joe Aldy, a fellow at the D.C.-based think tank Resources for the Future. The rest is more or less multiplication: If someone will accept a 1-in-10,000 chance of death for \$500, then the value of life must be 10,000 times \$500, or \$5 million.

If this strikes you as really stupid reasoning, well, it's because it is. Okay, maybe I can make that calculation about a bike helmet since bike riding has certain obvious dangers, but how do I make it about an unknown toxin in the food that I eat or the computer screen on my laptop? How does an individual make this calculation for complex processes that most people don't understand or even know about, such as biodiversity, ecosystem services, melting permafrost, or a change in disease vectors because of global warming from increased CO2 emissions?

The whole system needs to be scrapped. It is based on a series of false premises. The most obvious of course is that it reduces the value of human life to a financial estimate, which makes it possible for the Bush administration to argue with a straight face that saving the planet from

run-away climate change is too expensive! It ignores the fact that people place radically different values on things (I place a high value on wilderness; my neighbor could give a damn.) and averages us together into a meaningless hodgepodge whose only value is that it satisfies some dimwit bean counter's desire for NUMBERS". It also ignores future human (it always ignores non-human ones) inhabitants of the planet. Since there is absolutely no way to calculate how much they will think anything is worth, they are simply left out of the equation. They are not left out of the consequences however.

We need a new paradigm. Our goal should not be to calculate how much poison we're willing to ingest in exchange for a new carpet. We shouldn't accept any poison. We should demand only poison-free products, and while that may be difficult to achieve in some instances, it is a better way to think about these questions than the current way which is little more than "How many people can we kill before we have to do something about it."

Since my life is worth less now, do you think I can take a deduction for the loss on my next income tax return?

– DailyKos: "Bush EPA Decides That Your Life is Now Worth Less" by JohnnyRook Wed Jul 23, 2008 at 10:47:05 AM PDT

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This is the amount of money you will make your corporate overlord if you are a good worker your whole life. It has nothing to do with how much assets you die with. Hence the lowered value because of the economy being slower.  
- comment at Digg

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Law of supply and demand, 2007 was a banner year for births thus the value of one person is less.  
– comment at Drudge "Retort" Saturday, July 19, 2008

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Where in our Constitution does it give our government the 'right' to put a dollar value on our lives! That is despicable! .  
– comment at Drudge "Retort" Saturday, July 19, 2008

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The EPA does this in order to determine how much we can be poisoned by the biggest political contributors before it becomes too "expensive".  
– comment at Drudge "Retort" Saturday, July 19, 2008

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Hmmm. I remember something I learned once about the last time we put prices on the worth of people, but that was like 175 years ago. You know when slaves were the big commodity.  
– comment at Drudge "Retort" Saturday, July 19, 2008

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Whether it's real estate prices, the American dollar, or our standing in the international community, there are so few facets of our lives that have not decreased in value in recent years. Today, the AP uncovered the government's periodic monetary valuation of our lives, and it's \$900,000 lower than five years ago, down to \$6.9 million. Yes, according to the EPA, that is the "value of a statistical life."

It almost seems vulgar, certainly uncomfortable, to put a price tag on your a life, but the fact that we're worth less now isn't only an indication of the total shit state of our economy. It also happens to reduce the enforcement of pollution regulations if your life isn't worth the cost of the clean up. If this sounds cold, that's because it is. In an hypothetical example given by the AP, say a regulation costs \$18 billion to enforce and will prevent 2,500 deaths. At the old EPA figure of \$7.8 million per person, the lifesaving benefits outweigh the costs. At the new figure ... well, not so much.

Economists are calling shenanigans on the administration, saying it is just manipulating the data to reflect what it wants -- not having to pay to clean up the environment. Just as upsetting, our values dropped anyway by \$650,000, due to the reducing value of the dollar. This is what you get when you elect oilmen into the government. Although if T. Boone Pickens is changing for the better, is there hope for Bush?

- "EPA Lowers Value Of Your Life By \$900K" by Samantha Hulkower  
Friday, 11 July 2008 (EnviroWonk)