

Risk Perception

CS 594: Privacy & Security: Technical,
Ethical, and Legal

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The issue

- General public and experts often vary wildly on perceived risk.
 - E.g., experts would almost certainly rate driving in a car as greatest source of risk (# fatalities, lost life expectancy, whatever) among: driving in a car, radioactive waste, DNA technology, and nuclear reactor accidents
 - Survey of public would not get same result.
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Public perception driven by

Dread

- Involuntary assumption of the risk
- Induces feelings of dread
- Not equitable
- Risk not easily reduced

Unknown

- New risk
 - Risk unknown to science
 - Unfamiliar, not well understood
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So

□ Public worries a lot about

- DNA Technology
- Nuclear reactor accidents
- Radioactive waste

□ But not

- Home swimming pools
 - Auto accidents
 - Power lawn mowers
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Impact of *Incidents* on public

- ❑ Recency
 - ❑ Vividness
 - ❑ Affective saliency

 - ❑ So post 9/11 anthrax incidents huge for 2001–2004, still perhaps bigger than expert opinion would suggest.

 - ❑ All this has perhaps evolution justification, & even today “Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they aien’t out to get you.”
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