

Probabilities of Dying from Various Causes

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In the August 2006 issue of the *National Geographic*, S. Roth published a comparison of probabilities of Americans dying from various causes, based on 2003 data from the National Safety Council. The data provides some interesting information that helps to keep things in perspective when attempting to evaluate some of the risks associated with life. Table 1 below presents some of these data, comparing the number of fatalities from various causes to those from the use of fireworks. In Table 1 the relative numbers of fatalities have been normalized to 1 for firework fatalities. This was done to simplify making comparisons.

Table 1. A Comparison of the Annual Numbers of Fatalities for Various Occurrences.

Activity or Event	Relative Number of Fatalities
Fireworks Discharge	1
Lightning Strike	4
Legal Execution	5
Accidental Electrocutation	34
Accidental Firearm Discharge	67
Bicycling Accident	68
Motorcycle Accident	340
Drowning	340
Pedestrian Accident	540
Firearm Assault	1000
Falling	1600
Suicide	2800
Motor Vehicle Accident	4100

According to these figures, 5 times as many people are legally executed than are being accidentally killed as a result of discharging fireworks. Similarly, 1000 times more people are murdered with a firearm than are killed as a result of discharging fireworks.

All this notwithstanding, there are a number of ways for fireworks (especially consumer fireworks) to be made safer to use. Although the firework industry (especially through the American Fireworks Safety Laboratory) has done much to improve consumer firework safety in recent decades, there is more that can and should be done to further improve safety. In addition to being the right thing to do out of a sense of duty to the consumer, doing so also has the economic advantage of encouraging the continued expansion in the use of consumer fireworks.