

The Trentonian

Terrorism is scary, but driving (and flaming clothes) are scarier

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I remember a spectacular bachelor party I once attended in New York. It was ... not fit for print. But of all the moments that stand out to me, it was when a handful of guys in the limo put out the fire that was raging on my arm that sticks out the most.

I was smoking, and I apparently ashed onto my shirt sleeve, and my shirt sleeve caught fire. Small fire, as far as these things go, but fire nonetheless. A little flame licked up. It was shocking. Left unattended for another few seconds, and who knows.

Now, while this was undoubtedly one of the scarier — and stupider — moments of my life, I should note here it did not change anything. I still smoked afterwards, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this story, I continued to wear clothes. Yep. Despite the fact I lit my shirt on fire, I didn't swear off shirts. Nor did I cringe every time I saw a shirted individual smoke a cigarette.

I say this because each year, Americans have a 1 in 3.7 million chance of dying as a result of “ignition or melting of other clothing and apparel,” according to the National Safety Council (NSC).

And according to a CATO Institute study, I have a slightly less chance of dying as a result of a terrorist attack perpetrated by an immigrant. The chances are about 1 in 3.6 million each year, and that includes 9/11.

To be clear: I have an equal chance of my clothes catching on fire and killing me as I do getting blown up by a terrorist.

But I was a lot more affected by the recent terror attacks and terror attempts than I was by nearly immolating myself to the gods of idiocy. For instance: My wife and I were thinking about taking the kids to Point Pleasant this past Sunday but instead chose to go to Great Adventure, where there are guards and metal detectors and such.

So yeah. It affected me. It changed the way I lived my life, if only for a few days. I was afraid.

So the math, then: Light myself on fire = go to a strip club; a terrorist drops a few bombs around town = freakout city.

By the way, this column idea occurred to me while I was driving to work and ... oh wait. According to the NSC, I have a 1 in 8,826 chance of dying in a car accident this year, which

means I'm over 400(!) times more likely to die by crashing into a garbage can than I am to get blown up by a bomb in one. Yet, I continue to drive.

Maybe I should also stop walking my son to school, because I have a 1 in 55,000 chance of DWH (dying while walking) this year, or a 65x higher risk than a terrorist getting me.

And remember, once again, these numbers include 9/11, a true outlier when it comes to terror attacks at home.

But it's not just fires and car accidents. I have a 1 in 279,000 chance of death as a result of falling off a chair or bed, a 1 in 533,000 chance of dying in a "cataclysmic" storm and a 1 in 2.5 million chance of buying the farm as a result of falling off an animal. All of these are more likely than the 3.6 million-to-1 shot I have of being terrorist-ed to death.

Of course, there are some things less likely to kill me than a foreign-born terrorist. For instance, I'm between three and four times more likely to be killed by a terrorist as I am by the result of "foreign body entering through skin or natural orifice" (yikes) ... getting bit by a dog ... as a result of "contact with hot tap water" ... and finally, and famously, lightning: For every person killed by lightning in the last 40 years, there are four Americans killed by terrorists.

Does this mean we shouldn't worry about terror? Well ... I guess the answer is no. We shouldn't worry. We pay millions of people in America to do the worrying for us, and they're doing a tremendous job. From local police to CIA spooks, the front lines seem pretty well maintained.

Obviously, if you see something sketchy, you call the authorities. But we can't — and we shouldn't — give into the fear.

But, you know, while we're here ... slow down on the roads. What's the rush? I mean, you should see those lifetime car crash odds. They are ugly. One in 112 Americans will one day die on the roads. That's messed up. Be a lot more worried about that idiot blowing by you in the right hand lane than of just about anything else.