

Confidence in Air Safety Remains Aloft

Public confidence in air safety is holding up in the face of the EgyptAir disaster. But a sizable minority expresses some anxiety: Three in 10 Americans think recent crashes do indicate a broader problem with safety in the skies.

Three-quarters rate the safety record of commercial airline travel as excellent or good – a bit better than it was just after the TWA Flight 800 crash in July 1996. There's room for improvement, though: Just 26 percent give air safety the top rating, "excellent."

	Ratings of Air Safety:						
	Ex/Good Net	Excellent	Good	Fair/Poor Net	Fair	Poor	
11/7/99	75	26	49	21	16	6	
7/21/96	66	26	40	32	22	10	

Two-thirds also don't think the EgyptAir, Swissair (1998) and TWA crashes reflect on the overall safety of air travel. But 29 percent - a large population group, given the issue - think these crashes do "mean that air travel is getting less safe."

NON-FLIERS - Concerns are greatest, though, among those who don't fly. Only 46 percent of non-fliers give positive ratings to air safety; that soars to 83 percent of people who have flown. And positive ratings increase with frequency of flying.

Similarly, 26 percent of fliers think the recent crashes indicate a broader problem; that rises to 40 percent of non-fliers.

FEAR OF FLYING - Fearful fliers, naturally, are much more likely to express concerns over flight safety. But the amount of fear itself seems to be in check: Just 14 percent of Americans say they're afraid of flying on an airplane, compared to 20 percent in a 1985 poll. Twenty-nine percent say flying bothers them slightly; most, 56 percent, say they're not at all afraid.

Most, 58 percent, also believe that flying in a commercial airplane is safer than driving in a car, while 39 percent think it's safer to drive. Far more people are killed in car crashes in this country (an average of 800 a week); at the same time, of course, no single highway pileup is as devastating as a major airline crash.

GROUPS – Men seem much more comfortable than women with air flight. Seventy percent of men say they're not at all afraid of flying; this falls to 43 percent of women. Twenty-one percent of women say they're afraid to fly, compared to six percent of men.

And twice as many men as women say commercial air flight has an "excellent" safety record, 36 percent to 17 percent.

People who are afraid of flying have a sensible solution: They don't do it much, if at all. Forty-eight percent of them have never flown in their lives.

	Afraid	Bothered	Unafraid
Fly once or more a year	18%	32	46
Less often	34	46	39
Never flown	48	22	14

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone Nov. 3-7 1999, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

1. About how often do you fly on commercial airlines - at least every few months, once or twice a year, less often than that, or have you never flown?

	Every few months	Once/twice a year	Less often	Never	No opin.
11/7/99	7	31	40	22	*

2. Whatever your personal feelings about flying, how would you rate the overall safety record of commercial airline travel - excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	-----Positive-----			-----Negative-----			No opin.
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Fair	Poor	
11/7/99	75	26	49	21	16	6	4
7/21/96*	66	26	40	32	22	10	3
5/15/96*	64	17	47	32	22	10	4
6/6/95*	70	27	43	25	20	5	5
1/29/95	80	27	54	18	16	2	2
8/29/85*	65	23	42	28	21	7	8

*CBS

3. And what about your personal feelings - would you say you're afraid of flying on an airplane, it bothers you slightly, or you're not at all afraid of it?

	Afraid	Slightly	Not afraid	No opinion
11/7/99	14	29	56	1
8/29/85*	20	24	52	4

*CBS

4. As you may have heard, an Egypt Air jet crashed off the East Coast last week. This follows the crashes of a Swissair jet a year ago and a TWA jet three years ago. Do you think these incidents mean that air travel is getting less safe, or do you think they do not reflect on the overall safety of air travel?

	Less safe	Do not reflect	No opinion
11/7/99	29	65	6

5. Which do you feel is safer - flying in a commercial airplane, or driving in a car?

	Flying	Driving	No opinion
11/7/99	58	39	3